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page 185.

William Barry,

Mar 14, 1903.

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To

DOUGLAS HYDE

PRESIDENT OF THE GAELIC LEAGUE

AND TO

STANDISH HAYES O'GRADY

AUTHOR OF 'SILVA GADELICA'

WITH ADMIRATION AND SYMPATHY

SAMHAIN, 1900.

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	FROM THE HUNTING FIELD	1
II.	HECATE	9
III.	THE GREY TOWER	19
IV.	POET AND MAGICIAN	28
V.	ON RUMOUR'S WINGS	39
VI.	SONGS OF OLD TIME	51
VII.	A HEDGE-SCHOOL	70
VIII.	THE MIST AND THE STREAM	85
IX.	FANCY PAINTING	103
X.	THE FORBIDDEN DOOR	117
XI.	CHILDREN OF LIR	130
XII.	FREEDOM	147
XIII.	IUBHDAN'S MINSTRELSIES	160
XIV.	CASTING A HOROSCOPE	172
XV.	ST. BRANDAN'S KITCHEN	183
XVI.	THE LAST MAY DAY	192
XVII.	LANDLORD AND TENANT	212
XVIII.	HAWK OR EAGLE	226

CHAP		PAGE
XIX.	VARIOUS THREADS	245
XX.	IMPERIAL AUGUST	258
XXI.	THE COUSINS	270
XXII.	BY THE LONNDUBH	283
XXIII.	STRICKEN	300
XXIV.	AFTER MANY DAYS	318
XXV.	WIDOW AND WIFE	336
XXVI.	THE DEVIL'S CRAG	354
XXVII.	HAND IN HAND	363
XXVIII.	CEANGAIL—THE BINDING	373

The Wizard's Knot

CHAPTER I

FROM THE HUNTING FIELD

RENMORE was a great old Castle down in the country of MacCarthy Riach, on the edge of the Atlantic, its one huge tower dating back to King Richard II.; but landward it had grown into a modern mansion of dark blue limestone, a lawn interposed between its front windows and the oak thickets which were its pride, a brook running stealthily along its west wing to the stormy or silent waters of the Fiord. This evening the doors stood wide open, though it was November, and the air was dusk, and rain came up the wind. Arrows of shivering light struck through the hall and made its gloom visible. The curtains fluttered, sparks leaped out of the slumbering turf, which was piled up on a hearth, broad and deep, where no man sat to warm himself. There was quiet when the wind dropped, when the light had gone out. A

curious, dull quiet, not expectant, nor yet without some tinge of apprehension. The Castle had its ghosts; the winter's wind seemed to be calling them in a low whisper from their hiding-places, and, as the blast rattled and shook the open doors, a young man, wrapped up to the chin in a riding-cloak, and wearing heavy boots without spurs, passed through hastily from the weather outside. His boots clattered on the stone floor; he was clearly in a fierce or an agitated mood.

'O'Sullivan,' he called, when he had reached the foot of the marble staircase—a strange piece of architecture, Italian Renaissance, to find in a southern Irish Castle. 'O'Sullivan, where are you?'

A door opened abruptly at the side; out came an elderly but smart-looking man, whom you would at once have taken for what he was—the butler, house-steward, major-domo, of Renmore. He ran forward a step, paused, and broke into a high voice: 'God send I may live, Mr Edmund, is it you?' His throat seemed to shake the words and splinter them.

'Me, me; of course it is me! Why not, O'Sullivan? But where's Sir Philip?'

O'Sullivan looked thunderstruck. 'I was sending after you this very minute, sir,' he stammered. 'You haven't seen him? My old brain is all in commotion. Don't you know, Mr Edmund, what's happened at all?'

Edmund Liscarroll looked his astonishment. 'I'm only just back from the village,' said he. 'I want

my cousin immediately. What *has* happened?' He took a step forward, then moved back again. 'Did *you* hear it too? Was there ever such madness?' His voice dropped, and he turned and bit his lip viciously. O'Sullivan watched him in bewilderment. The wind seemed to be driving the light in flakes through the air, as if making game of it, and of them —so Edmund thought, after his poet's fashion, which no access of trouble or surprise could beat out of him.

'You know it?' he repeated with an ashy, eager countenance. 'How? Who brought the news?'

The steward drew back deferentially. He always resented 'Master Edmund's' sharp temper, but dared not show it. The young man's rage had often daunted him. 'Yerra, what would I know,' he answered, 'but that twenty minutes ago Banba came back to the stable, and she half killed with galloping, the poor beast, the reins cut into shavings, and the saddle gone from her?—'

'Banba? the mare Philip took out this morning to the meet? Without her master? Did you say alone, O'Sullivan?'

Edmund had become a different man on hearing this news. He came up and gripped the steward's hand hard. Now his face was in a flame. The old servant could make him out less than ever.

'I did, Mr Edmund,' he answered sulkily. 'The mare was with herself only, and in a lather of sweat, and wild, like the horse of The O'Donoghue. Where's

THE WIZARD'S KNOT

on the low-backed chair. 'What is it? Are you hurt?'

Sir Philip—since he it was, in cords and pink, as just home from the chase—lifted a hand to his forehead, gave a glance round, and looked into the fire once more. O'Sullivan shook his head ominously. He was beginning to speak when Sir Philip's voice stopped him.

'I thought I went out hunting to-day,' he said in a sleepy tone, addressing nobody in particular. 'Did I go?' He was feeling about in search of some object. 'Here is my hunting-crop,' he continued, after an interval. 'How comes it on my knees? Wasn't I at the meet?'

'You were, indeed, Sir Philip,' answered O'Sullivan, with an extraordinary tenderness in his expression, quite unlike the sarcastic or sulky tones in which he had spoken to Edmund. 'You were that same, sir; and you took Banba with you. Did the mare fall, or how was it?'

The young baronet appeared not to be listening. 'Those Galway horses are the devil for jumping,' he said reflectively, in his curious, disengaged way, 'but they don't understand hunting in Munster. She just put up her forefeet on the wall, and there I was! or did I dream it?—lying on the flat of my back! That infernal Banba! She'll have to be shot to-morrow.'

O'Sullivan had been stirring up the embers, which

now burst into a glorious blue and yellow flame. But while Sir Philip was soliloquising, he motioned to Edmund and drew his finger slowly across his forehead. The young man made a sign of intelligence. He took his cousin's arm and helped him, unresisting, to stand up. 'My dear Phil,' said he, entreatingly, 'you have had a rough day; you ought to be in bed. Come, I will help you to your room.'

'No, no,' answered the other, shaking himself loose. 'I'm not hurt. I've had a fall, perhaps. Yes, I must have had. But, then, I walked home. It's nothing. Don't stare like that, you fellows. How soon is dinner, O'Sullivan Beara?' He smiled, lurched forward, and had nearly tripped himself up. All his motions put one in mind of a man who wanted to outface it that he was none the worse for a drop too much. His short, red curls over the pink of his hunting-jacket took on a fiery gleam as he came up to the hearth and bent close to it again. Erect, he stood a head taller than his cousin; they had some points of resemblance, too, but Philip's habitual ruddiness of feature, deepening now to a violet tinge, was in contrast with the delicate, pale, though not consumptive look of his cousin, whose quick gestures had a passion in them more subtle, if not more profound, than the baronet's heavier movements.

'Put your hand to him, Mr Edmund,' whispered the major-domo. 'If he wasn't the soberest man in the barony, 'tis overtaken I'd say he was this night.

Won't you go to bed, sir?' he added coaxingly to the half-sleeping youth, who had sunk down in his chair, the image of fatigue.

'Send for Dr Driscoll,' said Edmund, and then he struck his forehead in desperation. 'No, we mustn't send; the country would ring with it. What in Heaven's name is to be done?' He walked up and down the hall, muttering to himself. 'Bad here and worse there! A day of misfortunes! Philip, I say,' coming to the bright circle of the flame and shaking his cousin rudely, 'will you dine or will you sleep? This is no place for you, anyhow. I am going to take you upstairs.'

The sharp voice, the hands laid on him, appeared to rouse Philip. He thrust Edmund aside. 'I told you, O'Sullivan, to get dinner ready; don't you hear?' he said in his throat. 'And to-morrow have Banba shot. Eddie, leave me to myself. Are you master in this house?'

He staggered along, caught hold of the balustrade, and clinging to it began to go up the stairs. 'I'll get him into the dining-room,' said his cousin. 'You put dinner on the table. Send up some brandy first.' To which O'Sullivan made no reply, but disappeared, as he had come, through the side door.

CHAPTER II

HECATE

WHEN Philip, repulsing every offer of help, had groped his way into the dim-lighted room above, he threw himself into an armchair and fell asleep. Edmund watched him in silence. 'Not an atom of good sending for Driscoll,' he repeated with a sort of exasperation; 'the message would be taken wrong, and Phil, my lad, you wouldn't have the ghost of a chance. Why did you run your head against a stone wall, this day of all days? Well, whatever comes of it, I shall get the credit—I always did. What an unlucky whelp I am!'

He kept on saying, thinking, this and the like, as more candles were brought in, plates laid, and dinner spread on the big oak table. There was a roaring fire in the chimney. 'Will I close the curtains?' asked O'Sullivan; ''tisn't right for the man in the moon to be showing his face at the window.'

Edmund sighed impatiently. 'Do as you like, good man. Where's the brandy? You have it? Moisten

a napkin with some and lay it on Sir Philip's forehead. We dare not wake him. Dip the cloth well; that way now; it is better than pouring it down a sick man's throat.'

'Your honour should know, indeed, what would be best,' murmured the steward. 'Whisky is a fine greatcoat when you've lost your clothes, as the song says; but I never hear tell it would do for a poultice on a man's head. Is it to tie it I would?'

His cousin had bound this 'brandy poultice' about Philip's head as a compress. In a few minutes it began to affect the patient; he sat up and looked round; then spoke as if coming to himself. 'I have had a nasty fall; but no bones broken; my head is all right. What is this?' He would have pulled off the bandage. Explanations followed. He was now quite sensible, and grasped Edmund's hand. 'You did well not to send for Driscoll,' he said, rising and taking his place at the table. 'I feel a bit queer, that's all. I shall be as right as a trivet to-morrow.'

'With God's help,' concluded O'Sullivan, looking at his master. 'With God's help, Sir Phil. You're young yet; a little thing wouldn't hurt you. 'Tis we ould stagers must be saying to ourselves, like King Cormac MacArt, "The end of a boat is drowning; the end of health is a sigh." But you will be out with the hounds on Tuesday, please God.'

He had fallen into Gaelic, as almost all, gentle and simple, did in that neighbourhood at whiles, the

people using it as their everyday speech, their masters hearing it from them—above all, in moments of excited feeling, and so getting acquainted with more phrases than they could readily pronounce. It was the native tongue of Miles O'Sullivan; as for Edmund, he not only spoke and wrote in it, but composed Irish songs, lyrical, sentimental, facetious; and Sir Philip understood what was said, though he seemed disdainful of its pathos and beauty. The old language was nothing to him. For books he had no turn; he detested reading; and he laughed in his sudden, silent way at Edmund the poet. To-night he found himself in another mood. '"The end of health is a sigh,"' he repeated, without looking up. 'That's pretty, O'Sullivan; but you will see me all there to-morrow, no fear.'

The steward began to serve dinner. He was thinking, 'Why wouldn't Sir Phil say "Plase God," like the rest of us? That Edmund there is a high young man, and he's saucy enough to me; but he'd say it. Is it because the master was brought up at those English schools across the water? That was his mother's doing, bad scran to her.' But of all this Miles's open, half-smiling face betrayed as little as his deferential and affectionate service about the young men.

They made a poor meal, without conversation, Philip recovering by degrees from his fit, Edmund glancing at him frequently across the table, and

forgetting to empty the silver cup which he raised to his lips. The fire blazed; the misty yellow moon stared in at the long windows; occasional drops of storm whipped the panes and drove on; as the hour went by, and the young master seemed more cheerful, his cousin fidgeted, got up and walked about, struck the turf-sods with his heel, and at last told Miles they should want him in a couple of hours, and he had better wait up. He took the hint and retired.

Still Edmund did not speak. There was silence, which instead of quieting the Baronet excited him. He returned the other's sidelong glances with a look into which fever threw some of its wildness. 'Do you think me very ill, Eddie?' he said at last. 'Your face is as black as thunder.'

'I wish I knew,' returned his cousin; 'how you do feel. I have something to—' he stopped dead and a lump came into his throat. Philip eyed him with amazement.

'You are not in a fright about me?' he said. 'Really, Edmund, I thought you had more pluck. It is all that poetry.'

A curious smile crossed Edmund's lips and vanished. 'Time is running on,' he said almost with a groan; 'it must be done. Phil, my dear boy, can you bear bad news? I'm sorry—cut to the heart—but there it is.'

'There is what?' asked Philip. 'Out with it, old

fellow, and never mind me.' But his cousin, like a man paralysed, sat and glared at him helplessly.

'What bad news have you?' insisted the other, getting up as he spoke. A large glass of brandy stood at his elbow; he took it down at a gulp. 'Out with it,' he cried again, 'my head is splitting.'

At length, in a strangled whisper, in a voice that was strange to himself, Edmund let the word loose. 'Phil, Lady Liscarroll is back in Ireland.'

It was a blow of stunning force, under which the young man winced.

'My mother? Back in Ireland? I thought she was a thousand miles away; that she would never come back. *Where* do you say she is?'

'In the village, at Dr Driscoll's. It is all that flighty Mrs Driscoll's doing, I could take my oath.'

The news had overpowered them, and they sat speechless. The moon stared in, the rain struck heavily on the panes. 'How do you know?' said Philip, after many minutes. His mind was all abroad.

'Because I have seen her. I was coming this afternoon from Cathal O'Dwyer's, and the doctor's wife met me. She beckoned me aside with a smile and a flounce; there was something to show me if I would step in at Driscoll's. I went, expecting I don't know what. I was taken into the haggard, left to my own thoughts awhile, and then the door opened, and a lady came out to me.'

'You don't tell me that my mother is her own maid's guest, in *my* village?' The man's shame and anguish were extreme. His eyes filled with hot tears.

'I tell you no less. In mourning—Philip, mark what I say—in mourning, but with the air I know so well, with a steady step, she walked up to where I stood and put out her hand. Forgive me—I drew back.' His cousin winced again, but said nothing. 'We hadn't much talk. There she was—Lady Liscarroll. In a few hours the village people would hear of it—our neighbours—the whole country.'

'But what brought her? In mourning, you say? That should be a sign of grace. Why is she here?'

His cousin's embarrassment grew every instant. He got up and went over to a heap of newspapers which were lying on the ground. 'Do you never read anything in the *Times* but sporting news?' he asked almost savagely. 'Phil, I must give you a harder blow than you got from Banba this afternoon. Here is what I read three weeks ago; you don't know it yet. I was in two minds whether to keep the paper or destroy it, until I said to myself you might be inquiring for it if the devil put it into your head. Look down this list.'

They held the paper up to the light, and Edmund directed his cousin's eye to an announcement among the recent deaths. It was curt enough. Philip recited the words in an undertone, as people read letters on the stage.

'At Wiesbaden, on 2nd November, Henry Lifford, formerly Captain in the King's Third Regiment of Dragoon Guards, very suddenly.'

'What does it mean by "very suddenly"?' asked Philip, in the same tone.

'I think it means he killed himself,' answered his cousin.

'After gambling at Wiesbaden?'

'After gambling at Wiesbaden. Now you know what you should have known three weeks ago if you had looked into your paper.'

'But—did you expect Lady Liscarroll back again? You saw this piece of news and didn't warn me.' A dreadful agony came into Philip's voice, though he neither sobbed nor shook. His brain-fever had been scattered by the calamity which tore his heart.

'I can't say I expected her back. She might not have been with Lifford; we lost sight of her long ago; it was never actually clear that Lifford had a hand in it when she ran. We didn't know what she was doing.'

'My father always believed she went away with Lifford.'

'Put this and that together—his death and her coming to Driscoll's—it must be Sir Walter was right. There is only one living soul besides that could tell us all the story, and that is Sarah North, now Mrs Driscoll. But she keeps her thin lips

tight. You will get no Queen's evidence from Sarah North.'

'Do I want any? You shake your head and say I do. Have you more news, Eddie?' This stalwart young huntsman was a sad spectacle. His brain would not work; he felt the lightning was in the cloud, but on which side would it next be flashing? His cousin pitied him, yet with a mixture of impatient scorn.

'The lady gave me a commission,' he said slowly; 'I brought it, to save you a world of talk and scandal. She has spent her fortune; I didn't inquire how, or what amount of it the bank at Wiesbaden has taken over. She calls herself penniless. She asks as a right or a favour, I can hardly tell which, that you will give her a home at Renmore.'

Philip made a mighty effort to restrain himself. 'Did you tell Lady Liscarroll,' he said passionately, 'that my father's grave is at Renmore? Look, you can see it from this window.'

He flung the glass doors open, walked through, and stood on the balcony. Edmund followed him. The mist was rolling off; a purple-blue sky came out in places, with faint stars, and the moon whitening. Away, but not far, under tall oaks, were leaning gravestones. 'My father lies there, Eddie,' repeated his cousin. 'Would Lady Liscarroll like to live with that full in her view?'

The scene was more stormy than peaceful; but

Death is the kingdom of peace. They felt somehow quieted. 'I hinted as much,' said Edmund.

'And what did she say?'

'She answered, with the least little smile, which made me harder than I ever felt to her—God knows that was hard enough!—"I am not afraid of Sir Walter, now he is dead!"'

'She shall never come here!' exclaimed Philip. 'This it is to have a mother! She shall not, Eddie. Do you think she ought?'

'Let us discuss it indoors,' said his companion, turning from the uncanny, troubled night. And when they were seated: 'Phil, I owe you my best advice; but the decision lies with you. Thank God, I have no mother—I never knew mine. Sir Walter was a kind father to me—'

'And Renmore would be yours if I died childless.'

'I don't deny it. Still, who am I that I should come between a son and his mother?'

Philip groaned. 'She has unmothered herself. Why did she leave me? I was but fourteen—her only son. Why did she? And my father—his heart snapped in two.'

'Blood is thicker than water,' replied the heir-presumptive.

'It is; I can see it on her hands. Yet you would have me take her in—sit at table with her—introduce, with lies about her long convalescence, my mother to her old friends again?'

Edmund gave him a piercing look. 'I think you will,' he said.

'Why, in the name of all that is bad?'

'Can you fancy your mother starving outside your gates, the country looking on?' It was a cold voice which uttered these unpalatable truths; Edmund hated himself for it; but the tone would not melt or soften.

'I can't see my way,' said Philip, his head drooping on his outstretched hands. 'To make her an allowance, the estate being in such a condition, is impossible. She will not go, since Lifford is dead. I am under a curse.'

'What noise is that below?' cried the other, starting to his feet. 'I hear voices. There are footsteps on the stairs. And the door is opening. Philip, be a man. Here's O'Sullivan.'

The steward tumbled into the room, pale as a sheet, all his golden words spent. He could only gasp, 'Sir Philip, your mother!' and reel against the wall as a stately person entered behind him, in mourning from head to foot.

'Yes,' said a calm, self-sustained voice, 'your mother, Sir Philip. Don't you know me?'

'You are Lady Liscarroll,' said her son, rising and facing her. 'My mother died ten years ago.'

CHAPTER III

THE GREY TOWER

THAT word of Philip's lightened through the room, loosing deep thunders in the imagination; and the lookers-on drew their breath heavily.

'Did Edmund bring you my message—my prayer, if you will?' said her ladyship, recovering as from a sudden blow. Her face was touched with colour beneath its dark lace, and the large, clear eyes—so like Philip's—sparkled for an instant with pain, then were steady.

'Why do you rise up from the dead to torment us?' interposed her nephew, coming from the window. 'Is this your reason?' He held out the newspaper, almost as a challenge; she caught the allusion, and a flood of crimson dyed her face and brow.

'I have come home to my son,' was the reply, tremulous but undaunted. 'Did you give him my message?'

'You never came to my father,' cried Philip; 'he is dead, by your hand. Is that black you wear in his remembrance?'

Again she put the stinging words aside. 'Philip, you are all that is left to me,' said this astonishing

woman, heedless of the stroke she might bring down by her bold speech, 'I am without house or home; I have no money, no friends, everyone has turned against me;' her voice sank into a melting key. 'Have I done wrong to come here? Where would you have me go?'

The steward, who had served her and Sir Walter from their first days together at the Castle, saw her now with admiration putting forth her enchantments again. He rebelled, and as of old was captivated. ''Tis true for you, my lady,' said O'Sullivan. 'I beg pardon, Sir Philip; where else would the mother turn if it wasn't to her son?'

'Silence, Miles,' broke in Edmund, sharply. 'This is not affair of yours, or of mine. Yes, Lady Liscarroll, I carried your words. You might have waited for the answer till morning.'

Hitherto the tall dark figure with its clear countenance freshened in the night wind, and its bright hair under the widow's weeds, had been standing close to the door. It now moved hastily forward. The lady put out her hands to Philip, who recoiled and fell against the dinner-table, staggering with it towards the fire. Edmund caught him, or he would have come down upon the blazing hearth.

'Go away, don't touch him,' cried he in a voice of killing contempt and hatred. 'Your son has been struck once to-day. Spare him your presence. Go back to Sarah North.'

He was helping the Baronet into a chair, putting water to his lips, doing what he could to keep him from swooning. The lady clasped her hands with a gesture of well-acted pity; but she made no further attempt to approach her son. Philip had not lost consciousness; he grasped Edmund by the arm and stood up, resolute, though still in a mental haze. 'You should have waited till I sent word,' he muttered with difficulty, not exchanging looks with the strange woman who called herself his mother, and whose voice and features floated slowly up to him out of his childhood's dreams and long-forgotten experiences.

'I was waiting,' said Lady Liscarroll, 'though not sure of your cousin—you always thought me a step-mother to you, Edmund, don't deny it—but a boy from the Castle told the doctor you were thrown—killed, he said—out hunting, and they were searching for the body. Could I wait when I heard such news? Dr Driscoll brought me; he is in the hall. Won't you let me nurse you, Philip?' No tones could be more persuasive.

'If you lay your hand on me,' said her son, with an icy accent, 'though you were ten times my mother, I will kill you. Send Dr Driscoll to his wife. I want no doctors. You shall hear in a minute what I will do with you.'

Her eloquence was no match for his. The moisture died off her lips, and she felt a strangling in her throat. Edmund, his nerves astrain, watched lest Philip should

get free from him and do some mischief beyond retrieving. The steward was aware of a chill sensation running through his old limbs. What was Philip about to say? Did he know it himself? The veins stood out on his forehead, and when he spoke his voice grated harshly on the ears of the listeners.

'Lady Liscarroll,' he began formally, still turned away from her, 'you have come late to my father's funeral. Late, but you are here. And my guest! I must give you lodging. O'Sullivan, is the High Room in the tower fit for use?' At these words the air seemed to shiver about them all.

'I couldn't tell you, Sir Philip,' stammered Miles, with colourless lips; 'the wife would know those things. 'Tis long since any person slept in the Grey Tower.'

'This lady will sleep there to-night—perhaps more nights than one. Your wife will be her maid. And you, Miles,' with a horrid, unnatural laugh, immediately snapped into the words that followed, 'shall be her gaoler, seneschal, anything you please to call it. Only you must see the tower is locked.'

'I will go down to the village again,' said the lady, all her feathers drooping. She thought Philip out of his mind. There came over her a sickening apprehension, as of plague suddenly broken out among them. Even Edmund was startled.

'You will do no such thing, madam,' replied her son; 'the tower is your place until I decide on a

change of air for you. Miles, go down and give my compliments to Dr Driscoll, he need not wait. Tell your wife my orders. Now, off with you. Lady Liscarroll, pray be seated until everything is ready.'

'Edmund, take my part,' said the unhappy woman, turning to him; 'don't remember old scores. I can't, I won't be imprisoned. What have I done? Come home, and my son treats me like—'

'Like his father's wife,' interrupted Philip. 'This is my lookout, not Edmund's. O'Sullivan, must I do my own errands?'

The steward was fleeing downstairs at that sound, in as great disorder as had marked his entrance. Edmund gave the lady a chair and stood a little way off. In his mind's eye he was scrutinising the large, dim chamber which he and O'Sullivan had peered into that afternoon, with its dream-like air of abandonment, its brown walls, rotting Indian mats on the stone floor, spindle-legged furniture in dark woods, and spectral mirrors—a room such as Albert Dürer would have put into his engravings for its ghostliness. No one had slept in it since the riotous old days when Renmore was filled with drinking and card-playing parties, in the prosperous war time, thirty years before this. He fancied the lady alone up there, with no companion or outlook but the sea. A caged eagle! She would be eating her heart alive.

The minutes dragged on, restless, yet slow, as when a crowd is waiting to see an execution.

Nobody spoke. There were stealthy noises in the Castle, feet on the stairs, movements heard from a distance. Finally, O'Sullivan threw the doors open. Two women, his wife and daughter, appeared behind him, carrying lights in silver sconces.

'The tower-room is ready, sir,' he announced, with a tremble in his voice.

'I will show her ladyship the way,' said Philip, rising and taking one of the candles. 'Will you have the goodness to follow me? Edmund, you come too.'

His mother cast a look of anguish round the room; but she rose, undecided whether to obey or to attempt fresh argument. She moved in the direction of the window, now ablaze with moonlight. 'Not that way,' remarked her son, coldly. 'You will see your husband's tomb out there. I am giving you a chamber from which it is invisible.'

Edmund said to himself, 'Why does she not die under these sarcasms? Has she gone through so much that she feels it no longer?'

For the first time he pitied this faithless woman, who had left husband and son in obedience to passion, and had her reward thus. He was more troubled than Philip, now leading the way from these modern rooms, fitted up in the solid and even majestic style of the later eighteenth century—Louis Seize a little travestied—to the stern old keep of Renmore.

The lights wavered, the stairs creaked; Lady Liscarroll, a heavy lace shawl drooping round her in lugubrious contrast to her son's crimson, walked last and alone, with slow steps, as one that means to face death ceremoniously. The silence was almost unbroken. From dark corners a bat flew across the lights now and again; there was a sough of wind in the higher parts of the castle, a thud as of mounting waves against its walls. The steward's grey-haired wife muttered prayers in Gaelic; Miles himself would have done as much, but his lips refused to articulate, and so the procession moved on.

'This is your room,' said Philip, when they had all but reached the highest landing, as he entered a low-ceiled bed-chamber. 'You will be perfectly safe here. The sea-gate is always locked; and on the side of the house I shall keep the keys. Nora will let us know your wishes. Good-night, Lady Liscarroll.'

He bowed and was going. His mother caught him by the hand convulsively.

'Woman, you are scorching me!' cried the young man, pulling himself away. 'Sleep, if your conscience will let you; better if it kept you awake.'

'But I am heart-broken,' she moaned; 'will you never forgive me, Philip?'

'Never,' he said, 'don't think it. Good-night.'

The others, except Nora, had not entered the High Room, as it was called. Philip took up his light, closed the door behind him, and descended the

stairs, last of the company. In a few minutes Lady Liscarroll heard the lower door slam and the key turn in its rusty lock. Nora was crying and praying at the same time. But her mistress uttered no prayer.

'How like Sir Walter he is!' she thought, going to the embrasure in which she could stand upright, while she looked out on the glittering waters. They were tossing, with long manes of white foam on them and dark blue gulfs between at an immeasurable depth below. Sign of life there was none; neither boat nor sail in any direction. A prison up in the air, and her life now a memory. 'I must make my escape from Renmore,' she thought, 'as I did once before. But there's no Henry now.' Her tears fell silently.

She stayed watching the moon and the waves all that night—the captive of her old self—as Edmund thought of her, a caged eagle.

'I have a thing to ask,' said the Baronet to his cousin, when they were parting on the stairs; 'you are not in this affair at all; but if I should be down with fever, will you promise to keep these keys until I am dead or myself again?'

'Where shall I find them?' answered Edmund, simply.

'They will be always under my pillow.'

'There is my hand,' said his cousin. 'I am not satisfied that you are doing what you ought: you are

certainly breaking the law; but I pledge you my word the tower shall not be opened until you open it yourself, or I am in your place.'

They shook hands upon that agreement, and went their ways to bed.

CHAPTER IV

POET AND MAGICIAN

THE strand by Renmore is a long, wide reach of silver sand, with sea weeds golden-green scattered over it like strings of jewels, about which the curlews whistle and the gulls dash in from the great deep crying like ghosts. There, beside the high castellated rocks overgrown with a fairy forest, flecked with tiny streamlets, Edmund was pacing, meditative, at an early hour next morning. He had left his cousin asleep, the tower locked, and a world of sorrow in the dark house. Now his heart took to itself the joy of these purple seas and the sunshine that filled the little paradises of verdure, which not winter itself could lay quite bare. He was sad and glad, as men of his temperament are always. The tragedy of last night went through him; yet he could study it as a play, and judge it from outside. How would it end? What was his part in it? The waves, the sunlight must teach him that, like so many secret things they had revealed before to him. So he walked on the silver sands, meditating.

He had not been there long when a light, irregular

step, crunching the fine dust, drew on behind him and made him turn.

'Ah, Cathal, what brings you this way?' he cried cheerily; 'you seldom leave your print on the sands.'

'No, indeed,' said the newcomer, with a laugh, ''tis on the memories or the shoulders of the boys of Renmore I am marking those hieroglyphics. But Saturday is a day of rest for my head and my arm. I lave, as the poet says, the impious sons of malediction to their grovelling propensities, and I'm walking in the air, contemplating the sun, like my ould friend Socrates, the son of Sophroniscus, in the comedy.'

'You will be the better for it,' said Edmund. 'Do I disturb your contemplations, or shall we walk together?'

'Two against Hercules, says the proverb, Mr Edmund. But what's on you, sir? I would say you were after having a heavy drame.'

'What sharp eyes you have, O'Dwyer,' said young Liscarroll; 'but it is no dream, I fear.'

The schoolmaster did not care to question him, and they went a little way in silence. If Edmund, with his slight figure, dark hair and dark eyes, was the refined and almost Byronic version of the Irish poet, Cathal O'Dwyer was the humorous, the Rabelaisian, the Gargantuesque. Tall and wiry, in his faded blue coat with brass buttons, in his knee-breeches and grey stockings, he threw into his walk a dancing air, subdued but elastic—he was one of the

best dancers in the country—and his long, sallow features, irregular enough, though not vulgar, had a constant trick of seeming to smile when he was most serious. He moved with a spring, quoted by the yard, was merry, and not always wise, but even in his cups an admirable Greek and Latin scholar. Nor had he a friend closer to his heart than young Edmund Liscarroll. His grey eyes twinkled now with fun and curiosity.

'Well, my dear poet,' he began, 'if you didn't drame last night, I did. And a quare drame it was. Would you listen to me telling it?'

'Why not? It will while away the time.'

'As the Fenian heroes did with story-telling—one part of the night in ould tales, one part in singing to the harp, and the rest in the sweetness of sleep and slumber. But this drame I dreamt a second time; indeed, I could never forget it. 'Twas about your uncle, Sir Walter—God rest him, poor man!'

'Last night you dreamt of Sir Walter? What put that into your learned head?'

'Erudition, sir, is not soothsaying; that's more than I could tell you, or you me. The drame I dreamt twice was, compendiously, the following. I thought in my sleep Sir Walter came to me, in his ould scarlet hunting shuit, but—he was dead; I knew him to be departed; and he muttered and mumbled, for the teeth were out of his jaws, talking Irish or English (bad luck to his English—'twas that ruined

him !) till I lost patience with the man entirely. "Come hither, then," says he, in a pet, "and you'll see what I mane ?" My dear Mr Edmund, with that I was standing by his grave, and it gaping like a whale's mouth—I'm telling you no lie—and says he, pointing to it with a bony finger, "When I go back into that, another tenant will be sharing it." In the deep sleep that was on me, I trembled, and said I, as well as I could in my fright, "What other, Sir Walter ?" Once more he began to mutter and mumble—by times I could give a guess at the name, and, high over ! 'twas gone from me. I thought to myself he said this or that—but,' checking his recitation, and speaking more seriously, 'no matter ; doesn't Father Falvey tell us we're a parcel of ould women to be minding drames and pishogues ? Let his Reverence make out the rest of it. However, as I'm an approved man of veracity, that was my drame.'

'Sir Walter might well have been out of his grave last night,' said Edmund, bitterly. 'I wish to God his wife was in it.'

'His wife—the lovely, wicked woman that ran from him, as my Sheila ran from me ? Isn't she in her own grave this day ? '

'She is not, Cathal. You got one piece of news in your sleep ; did you hear no other waking ? '

Cathal shook his head. 'I wasn't out in the hanging mist after sundown; and none of the neigh-

bours came in. Joan, good girl, spares the rush candles on us and the sod of turf; we go early to bed often. 'Tisn't like ould times whin we'd sit up half the night telling stories. So Lady Eleanor isn't dead yet?'

'You may as well let it be known, Cathal, that my aunt is at Renmore House. Say you had it from me; if the country must talk, let it talk.'

The schoolmaster gave a spring on hearing this intelligence. It stirred him mightily, but he had sense enough to perceive that Edmund was deeply moved by the sudden resurrection of a story which, in its time, had set tongues wagging thirty miles round. As they paused on the edge of the green waves, he soliloquised after his peculiar fashion.

'So there's my drame! 'Twas his wife Sir Walter was dooming, and well it became him. Ah, Mr Edmund, my curse upon every woman but my poor fool of a Joan—however, she's young yet—and my malediction upon love and them that gave it to us. Would I like Sheila to come home on me, after she giving the back of her hand to me and the poor child? I don't think I would, but men are soft and women hard, and that's the way it is. And did Sir Phil take it kindly?'

'A bad mother is more shame to a man than a bad wife,' said Edmund, scooping up the dry sand, which he flung into the waves as they came dancing before his feet.

'True for you, sir. 'Tis a pity he couldn't bind her in bonds till the life was out of her. But how tough they are—the vipers! I'll engage Lady Eleanor has as fine a blush on her as the day she first came to Renmore.'

'On her cheek she has,' said Edmund, laughing scornfully. 'Do you think it goes deeper?'

'Maybe not. We used to call her the Beautiful Witch. Everyone of us would dance to that woman's music, I tell you, like a pack o' seals after a fiddler.'

'Even you, the White Wizard,' laughed Edmund again. 'More shame for you, O'Dwyer! But if the world ran after her, why did she break loose? I was a lad of ten or eleven at the time, and got no hint of the story, but I whistled and sang on my own account when she flew across the sea to France.'

'Indeed, you were no favourite with your aunt,' said Cathal, 'we all knew that. The people used to be saying she never forgave her husband for laving the estate to you after Mr Philip, instead of her own relations.'

'Yes, she hated me, and I gave her as good as I got. We were always falling out; sometimes she would try to make it up again and put little presents in my room, and I broke them and flung the pieces out of the window. Whatever she did, my aunt was to me just a fair-faced, poison-brewing hag. Not like you—a harmless, necessary wizard.'

'Harmless? You may say that,' cried the other, lifting his conical hat skyward. 'What harm would the like of me do to man or baste? If I do be skilled in a few useful incantations, or take a cut o' the cards once in a while, 'tis to assist the poor people I do it. Sure, I never give a cast of my art save and except when Dr Driscoll's medicines would do them no more benefit than ditchwater. And that's often, God knows,' he said with a satirical laugh. 'But you have a right to call Lady Eleanor a hag. Troth, she was a valiant and formidable beldame—the divil's cure to her, saving your presence.'

'Put as many curses on her as you will find in the Black Book of Moling,' said her nephew, heartily. 'She will be a match for them all. But tell me, Cathal, did you hear, or do you know, the ins and outs of this bad business at the time?'

'Did I hear?' echoed the wizard, pausing before a miniature cave in the limestone, wreathed about in withered Virginia creeper and made beautiful by a sheet of falling foam that met the tide and danced upon it. 'I believe nothing that I hear, and but the half of what I see, Mr Edmund. However, I made a tale of it, aisy enough, to myself.'

'You thought?—'

'I thought young Lifford had good looks, and Lady Eleanor had good eyesight, and 'twas Diarmuid and Grainne the second time with them.'

'That is simple. But why didn't my uncle chase

them till they were caught? Was Sir Walter only a white-livered cur after all?'

'He was not, sir,' answered Cathal, flaring up suddenly. 'Am I white-livered? Yet I did the same thing. Or less, for your uncle hunted high and low to come at the Captain. I could tell you the way it was from myself.'

Edmund let the old man recover his exhausted breath in silence. O'Dwyer caught some of the sparkling water and put it to his lips; then, not without an effort, he continued: 'God forbid you should ever have the knowledge of these things experimentally, my dear young friend; but as a poet you could go deep into them. Why wasn't I hunting down Sheila when she flew out upon the wind? Tell me that if you can?'

'You let the hawk go with her jesses—to feed on carrion,' said Edmund.

'I did—and I didn't. No, sir, I was broke, and mad, and sick at the tidings. My blood ran red hot, and thin was ice and snow inside me. If I caught her that day, by the great God in Heaven, I'd be pounding her bones till they were a paste, as you'd pound them in a mortar; I'd make a corpse of the woman. And, after that, she'd be lying dead there, laughing at me. Who would get the upper hand thin, I ask you?'

'That's a fine bit of soul-history,' said Edmund. 'You remember the man that drowned his wife in a bog-hole?—but still she had the last word. You

didn't want to be a second volume of that helpless *omadan?*'

'You have it now, sir. Maybe I was obnoxious to reproach, but if you blame me as a fool, don't blame me as a coward. Sir Walter had no manes of striking Lifford, for he was gone out of sight. Would he purshue Lady Eleanor till he brought her down? till he choked and drowned her—she screeching victory out of the bog-hole? There it is all for you.'

'He should never have married her,' said the young man.

Cathal showed his yellow teeth pleasantly. 'Take my word for it, 'twas she married him. A great catch he was for Miss Ashby, with his ould Irish name, and his castle and his lands—to say nothing of his handsome face. I'll pawn my life she put the banns in herself.'

'No, no, you're taking the wrong end of the story,' said Edmund, laughing but provoked. 'Leave my uncle the credit of his infatuation. I grant you Lady Liscarroll twisted him round her little finger when they were man and wife. The Liscarrolls had always a terrible power of falling in love.'

'Will Miss O'Connor be saying as much on Tuesday, I wonder,' remarked O'Dwyer, plucking an ivy-leaf from the face of the rock and chewing it.

His companion flushed up to the eyes, and his under lip quivered. 'Is the Lady of Silverwood coming over on Tuesday as she promised?' he said,

with a stammer, affecting to watch the sea-mews turning in the sunlight.

'To my hedge-school? She will that, if the rain keeps up in the sky. And you, Mr Edmund? But you wouldn't miss it for a thousand pounds. So you lave the mocking word on your family? They are under bonds to Cupid? He's cruel and sweet, and his hands raich down to hell, says the Greek poet. Go home, sir, and construe those lines; then pity Sir Walter, anyhow.'

'It is an idyl of Moschus; I remember,' said the youth—he was barely one-and-twenty—still blushing. 'We will try how it rings in Irish some of these days. All I say now is that if my uncle had not been under a spell, he never would have brought an English girl, a Protestant, London-bred, and ten years younger than himself, home to Renmore. Hallo!' breaking off with a start, 'who comes here?'

''Tis the steward, Mr O'Sullivan,' said Cathal; 'he will be wanting you, and I bid you good morning. Don't mind me, sir; there's a goat-path along the rocks I used to scramble upon when a gorsoon. Till Tuesday—and Miss O'Connor!'

He began climbing, with no contemptible agility—as he would have said himself—for a man of his years, and was soon out of sight and call.

'What is it, Miles?' asked Edmund, in grave disquiet. 'Were you looking for me?'

'I was, sir,' answered the steward. 'Plaise come

up to the house at once. Sir Phil is very quare. He didn't rise this morning; and I think the fever is on him; he doesn't appear to know any person about his bed.'

'You have not told Lady Liscarroll?' said the other, his trouble increasing.

'I waited till you saw the master,' said O'Sullivan. 'If he was dying, she must know it, surely.'

They almost ran in their eagerness to get to the Castle.

CHAPTER V

ON RUMOUR'S WINGS

THE wings of a scall-crow seemed to beat upon Edmund's temples when he passed into the great and stately chamber in which Philip was lying. It had been kept dark; he now let the sunshine pour in upon his cousin's bed, hoping it might kindle some touch of life inside the brain. But to no purpose. The features, suffused and heavy, gave threatenings of a paralytic stroke; the eyes were closed and would not open. O'Sullivan had roused his master several times, only to be fixed by a glance without meaning, and to hear inarticulate words that died in the throat. No repugnance, such as Edmund felt to calling in Dr Driscoll—which was opening the doors, he argued, to Mrs Driscoll—could avail in a moment so fraught with consequences. The doctor must come at once.

He was already on the road; so much O'Sullivan had ventured. Edmund saw him into the room on his arrival, and helped him, with a sickening heart, through the operations that followed. He bled his patient copiously; it was the one thing needful and sufficient in the doctor's day, whatever the occasion;

and, right or wrong, it had its effect on Sir Philip. When next he opened his great hazel eyes, he recognised his cousin, and was able to speak, faintly but with understanding.

'I have brought you over the fence in fine style,' said Dr Driscoll, with his slightly rasping accents, turning to wash his large hands. He was an ill-made man, tall but lean, and somehow crooked—you could hardly say where—with a rather deformed nose, which had suffered in an ancient quarrel with friends or flagstones, and bushy grey eyebrows over cavernous eyes. An ill-dressed man, too, smelling of whisky and stale tobacco. Last night he had been sent away from the Castle, as he told his English wife, 'with a flea in his ear'; it was no modesty that now held him back from dancing on the bedroom floor; nothing but a remnant of professional decorum, not utterly worn to rags in his five-and-twenty years' campaign as a country doctor. He had a heart by proxy—the tender heart of his calling; otherwise, he did but know that organ, said Cathal O'Dwyer, 'anatomically, as a muscle, and financially, as a source of revenue.' The interpretation might be that when he married Sarah North she put her savings into his business. He treated his patients like a gentleman as long as they were ill; but the rest of mankind, and these after recovery, seemed to him—again borrowing from the schoolmaster—'gross of appetite, crafty, and full of malice.' And said Cathal, 'How quare a thing it

is that we do be taking the world for a cracked sixpenny glass to our own coarse faitures? 'Tis his reflection the doctor sees and spreads it out.' With O'Dwyer the medicine-man had long waged a war of epigrams; but when, on hearing this account of himself, he said blandly to Orbilius—another name for the wizard among his grown-up scholars—'I fear, sir, you are losing your olden adjectival might,' it was felt that victory hovered doubtful on each helm. Driscoll had a tongue as keen as his best lancet, and was a famous hand at drawing blood with either.

But his 'craft and malice' now seemed to command a splendid scope. 'Yes, Mr Edmund,' he said with a consequential air, 'the baronet is in for a stiff run, though he's over the first fence. He will not be himself again yet. And he'll want good nursing. I'll send up Mrs Driscoll; she knows him from his childhood, though I'll be missing her sadly at home. But, indeed, I have a congratulatory message from her to Lady Liscarroll, if I might see her ladyship one moment.'

This conversation took place in the drawing-room, which had been fenced off from the older hall, and had windows opening on the lawn.

'I will convey your wife's good wishes to my aunt,' said Edmund, keeping down his voice; 'you will not be surprised if she sees no visitors at present. As for the nursing, I have a plan which will not deprive you of Mrs Driscoll's society. The steward's wife

was a kind of foster-mother to him, you know. She will attend on Sir Philip.'

The doctor hummed and hawed. 'I would have liked my own nurse in so complicated a case,' he said. 'The ould woman is good enough to mind a baby; but here is brain fever disclosing itself. Mrs Driscoll knows the pharmacopœia almost as consummately as myself.'

'Then she can help us by mixing the medicines,' said Edmund, gravely.

'And she is not—it would be no use for her to call on her ould mistress that was so kind to her?' asked the doctor.

'Not for a while,' said young Liscarroll, rising to cut short the argument.

'By my hand, sir,' answered Driscoll, angry but smiling, 'they may well call you the Tanist—no offence meant—but I'd be calling you Renmore itself. 'Tis you that's in the saddle.'

He had neither opened the door nor got the key to this incident; and it ruffled all his feathers. What had overtaken Lady Liscarroll? She was to be kept out of sight, clearly. Well and good; Mrs Driscoll's tongue was as sharp as his own; and before the day had run out, it would set the neighbourhood talking. The doctor despised Philip as an ill-bred, high-nosed, English churl that never had a word for him and passed by his wife without seeing her. They were enemies by instinct and by fate, doomed to live in

one village, like rats in an egg-box. Dr Driscoll's fancy flew near the ground; of this kind were his metaphors. He could not deny that Edmund was what the people thought him—a lad of genius that might have been inspired by that most gifted and terrible among the fairy-folk—the Leannan Sidhe. But while he rather dreaded the poet, he had nothing but contempt for the 'Sassenach spawn,' who never opened his mouth in public, and seldom in private—who was a sportsman in the hunting field, but never invited company to his Castle. 'If he got now the red wound of death,' muttered the doctor, driving away, 'I wouldn't shed a tear, unless to see Edmund in the stirrups—shortness of life and hell to the two of them! But we'll get a grip on the son yet, by manes of the mother, or Sarah is more fool than the day I bought her.'

Such a venomous fire, as they say in those parts, had Lady Liscarroll set alight by her early and her late coming to Renmore. It was soon blazing merrily. The neighbours had her name in all their mouths by nightfall—with questions which no man, no woman even, could answer, and the mystery flaming high over shore and mountain. When did she come? Was it true that Lifford killed himself? Did the sight of his mother meeting Sir Philip on horseback strike him out of the saddle? And where was she this night? Every cabin along the village street felt the warmer for these sparks and splinters

of a magic blaze, kindled discreetly, diabolically, by thin-lipped Sarah North. The old people that remembered Sir Walter's wedding with beautiful Miss Ashby loomed upon younger imaginations like sibyls or scalds, as they crowded round the purple-flaming turf and told their legendary tale.

The Baronet, too, was at death's door; at the last gasp; dying without priest or minister; for wasn't he christened a Catholic and reared a Protestant? And did he ever darken chapel or church since he came home, three years ago, from College in England? So portentous a spectacle, of the son killed by a flash from the mother's eye—and she long since in the power of Satan—made their hearts burn strangely. For the world not one of them would have 'faced out' to the Big House that night after dark. Yet they had it always before their eyes while they spoke of the dreary, frightening, excitable old times, which had all at once come to life again. The very house was alive and acted in the story. It was an enchanted cave, the village clustering round its horrible mouth, peering into the red fire that leaped out of it at whiles.

Sir Philip, however, was not dying or dead—'but worse,' as his cousin said in the inimitable Irish way—he was 'the suffering dream of a man' while the fever struck inwards. He did not rave; his mind peered questioningly out of his tired eyes; some dull thought was consuming his flesh until, as he lay there under

the great tester of a bed, he seemed to Nora O'Sullivan 'a sketch of bones,' or, in Cathal's phrase, 'a bare anatomy.' O'Dwyer, strange to relate, was to be often now at the big house, by a right of entry such as Edmund still refused to Mrs Driscoll. How would this come to pass? Simply but fatefully, as the road of life turns and we follow it—because there is no other—through rough and smooth, over steep and hollow, not guessing what is before us. It was Edmund's little plan of keeping out the doctor's wife that brought in the wizard.

Driscoll had gone, all tongues and wings, as Rumour is painted, to spread his looking-glass libel on this proud old family, far and wide; and the young cousin must act for them, taking no man's counsel but his own. He unlocked the tower, sent Nora, the steward's wife, to wait on her foster-son, and presented himself in Lady Liscarroll's room. She had not slept, her glazed eyes showed it; but the hot coals of passion would speedily kindle them. No longer the woman of last night, trapped and half subdued, but armed at all points and looking as fierce and high as Queen Meave.

'You come from Philip,' she cried with some haughtiness, holding out her hand, which the young man touched slightly. 'Is he ashamed of himself?'

'I don't know,' said Edmund, 'neither do I come from him. *I* hold the keys of the tower.'

She made him a sweeping curtsey. 'You will be

my kind gaoler,' she said. 'Allow me an interview with my son. I have much to say to him.'

'You cannot say it now. Sir Philip is ill; he may be dying.'

'Then you are master here,' she said in a beaten voice. 'Have I come a day too late?' The glazed eyes grew dimmer, a tear fell as she spoke.

Her nephew marked with astonishment and a thrill of dislike that she passed over Philip's dying to reflect on her own bad fortune. A woman of this make was quite new to him. But while he stood silent in extreme fury, she recovered her natural—or was it her artificial?—attitude.

'Is Philip in such danger, and I not at his bedside? My dear Edmund, let me go to him; you came to tell me, to break the news—I never said you were hard-hearted. When we quarrelled worst, I never did. Where is Nora? We will go down together.'

She was at the door, but Edmund stood in her way, immovable. 'I am not master—yet—' he said significantly. 'The master has made me his lieutenant. Lady Liscarroll, you are not to go down. Nora is with Sir Philip. The tower entrance is locked.' He held the great iron key in his hand.

The lady sat down, despairing. 'What a fine gentleman you are!'—she threw a torrent of spite into her accent. 'Is this how you take your revenge? Was it a crime in me to choose my kith

and kin to succeed here—before such a Liscarroll as you? If it was, I glory in it.'

'I cannot argue that question,' said her nephew; 'at present I execute Sir Philip's orders. Why did you break into the lion's den? You should have had a taste of the Liscarroll temper, enough to warn you that they don't trifle. What tempted you back?'

'Sit down, Edmund,' she replied eagerly; 'take that chair and we will talk about the Liscarroll temper. You have it too; but with a difference. I can explain my sad story to you.'

He shook his dark ringlets, that gave almost a feminine air to the thoughtful, passionate features. 'It is soon told, and can never be explained,' he said, yielding so far as to sit down. 'You are one of the evil women that blot the sun out of our sky. You had a husband — a child — you left them — What more?'

'Oh, but my husband had a wife,' she said vehemently. 'Did he keep his part of the bargain?'

'Sir Walter? Why, there never was the shadow of a stain on his life,' answered Edmund. 'What scoundrel has belied him?'

'I say he broke the promises on which I married him. He did for twelve years what my son and you are doing to me now. He kept me a prisoner in this tower.'

'It was your home; where else should a wife be but with her husband?'

'I accepted Walter Liscarroll from ambition. Yes —make the most of it—from ambition. He had the world at his feet. I thought he would be one of the first Catholics in Parliament, and a leader of men, and that I should have a place by his side. We were married. In eighteen months all was over. He fell out with O'Connell and gave up his interest in public affairs. He forced me to leave London. We exchanged the best society in the world for hunting squires and their wives; or else we had no company at all. I married one man; Sir Walter turned out to be another.'

'You took a poet for a politician. Your ambition fell below my uncle's.'

'I was his widow,' she exclaimed, pressing a white hand on her heart. 'His widow! What comfort had I in his poems which he never published, or in his long days of silence? He neglected me. Whether for someone else, or for his tags and his musings, what did I care? The man should never have had a wife.'

There was undeniable truth in it; Edmund recalled the abstruse, sauntering, silent man, full of his fancies, who was looking for rhymes as he rode to hounds, or spent mornings and afternoons 'under the woods so green'—an exquisite Irish phrase that delighted him—when he was not down on the strand, watching the seals at play. A musing, melancholy singer of old songs, Art the Lonely come again in the guise of a

Munster gentleman—marked for solitude—of that singular, incomprehensible race which in Ireland from time out of mind has peopled the wild places with monks like St Kevin of Glendalough. What Saxon-bred man or maid could unravel their mystery? Edmund looked with compassion at the lady now.

'If you had an angel for your husband, I suppose,' he said, smiling, 'you wouldn't stay long with him?'

'Angels have no business to be married,' was the sharp reply. 'Sir Walter did not call himself an angel when we first met in London.'

'I believe he was always the same,' answered Edmund; 'he only dabbled in politics. Lady Liscarroll, you should have known—but how were you to know?—that every real Irishman is at heart a monk.'

She went to the window impatiently and looked long at the great waters, still as sunshine, and as bright. 'Oh, if I were on a skiff out there, I would soon leave your monks,' she said, without turning. 'It was a night like this day for clearness when I ran, the white sails over me, to France. You are right, Edmund. Monks were always my abhorrence. I sent Philip to Eton, in the hope he would grow up as unlike his father as possible—an English gentleman—a Protestant—I hate your strange religion.'

'But he is not a Protestant—he is nothing—and

all his father's moods and tempers descend on him at times, though he couldn't scan a verse to save his life. What have you gained by your stepmother's policy?'

'Not much,' she answered. There was an intense silence, into which the endless murmur of the sea came plashing.

'She has never once named Henry Lifford,' said her nephew to himself; 'how like a woman!'

'Give me a day's grace, Edmund,' pleaded his aunt, 'with Philip. I will come back to my cage. Just one day.'

He rose and uttered the word which had brought him. 'You shall have constant news. If he is dying, you shall be there, I promise you that. Now, as Nora is nursing him, I ask your leave to send you another attendant—a girl we can depend on from the village. You may remember Joan, the daughter of the schoolmaster, O'Dwyer.'

'I remember Sheila,' said Lady Liscarroll, struck; 'Sheila left her husband.' The coincidence shook her a little.

'She did. You may take Joan instead of Philip,' said her nephew, touching that wound with steel. 'They had each a mother and they lost her. Joan will not be hard upon you.'

CHAPTER VI

SONGS OF OLD TIME

It was Sunday morning, mild almost as an English April, though December was at hand. Mass had just been celebrated by Father Falvey in the whitewashed village chapel, and crowds of men, with a sprinkling of women, stood outside on the road exchanging a week's gossip between the people of the town and of the hills, who met only at Mass or market. This was the hour fixed for Cathal O'Dwyer and his daughter to set out towards the Castle. Many a soft-hearted boy sent longing looks after the damsel in a crimson petticoat and tight blue bodice as she passed along, her grey shawl drawn over 'the dark branching tresses'—to speak with our Celtic poets—and held modestly before her face in the Oriental fashion. She walked with the peculiarly graceful step of the Munster maidens, upright and rhythmical, as if the heather lifted beneath her tread, and in her silent mouth there was music, if its sweet lines told no false tale. But neither she nor Cathal spoke to anyone—a circumstance which was afterwards remarked upon.

'Felim,' said Garret O'Riordan to his 'true-brother'

—that is, being interpreted, son of the same father and mother—'I have a riddle for you. What thing is there as red as blood, as white as snow, and as black as the crow's wing?'

'Aisily tould,' answered Felim, laughing, for he had observed the direction of his brother's glances. 'But what ails the two of them not to spake to you and me? That Joan of the schoolmaster's is a branch of beauty—cheeks, lips and hair. Mother did well to bring her up in our place whin she lost her own.'

'Had th' ould man even a weeny fortune to give with her 'tisn't long she'd remain without a husband,' said Garret; 'but, sure, they never had a day's luck in that house, and Cathal, in spite of his knowledge, would drink the ocean dry.'

'If I had that much of a fortune,' replied Felim, flicking his fingers—and a fine fresh lad of his inches he was—'or O'Dwyer could give her a cow's grass, I'd be matchmaking with Joan long ago. But what signifies talking? He hasn't a dish o' crab apples to his own cheek. 'Tis a lamentable thing he is not able to keep from the full pitcher till empty it is.'

'Well, we have but the one life,' said Garret, the Epicurean. 'He never did a ha'porth of harm to any but his own. My heart is sore for the little girl. Though she has a step like the roe-deer, and a song like the bird's from the billows, I'm in dread she will die an ould maid. But if she was Davy Roche's daughter, and all the land he sucked to himself was

coming to her,' pursued Garret, turning a bright eye on Felim, 'let her screech like a hare in a gin, or walk lame of her two legs, I'll engage she'd never want for sweethearts.'

'Yerra, let me alone with Davy Roche,' answered his brother; 'he'll be purchasing Renmore estate one day of the days, with his firkins of butter and his long laises—the miser!'

'And he has a hould on every man of us that ever borrowed a shilling from him. But I see Maurice Noonan there beckoning to us. Will we step into the haggard and take the *sheoch* of a *dudeen* to clear our mouths of Davy Roche? We're with you, Maurice; don't be running from us that way like a redshank.'

This had long been the tune to which Renmore lads—nor they alone—would 'sing and harp' about Cathal's daughter, who minded them as little as any girl that was ever poor, proud and pretty. But now she went up with the tender-hearted old wizard till they reached the demesne, which lay about two Irish miles beyond the village. It had tall fences, and within them a tangle of oak and birch and high-shooting firs; but there was little of an open space anywhere round the grim grey Castle, except between the *reilig*—or small burying-ground—which encircled some nameless monastic ruins, and the river called Lonndubh, the Blackbird, from its swiftness and its song. Cathal had lost his voice; he felt that Joan was going from him—felt it deeply, and would

have said, 'There's no loquacity in great grief,' were he not an example of the proverb which rose before his mind. 'My drame of Sir Walter is taking her into itself,' he thought; for he was nothing if not a creature of omens, forebodings and secret intimacies with the unseen powers behind us, to which he stretched out a faltering yet curious hand.

'I'll do well yet in this house,' said Joan, crossing herself as they passed in. 'Sure the woman, if she was a wolf itself, can't ate me. We'll be saving the fine white shillings for Mr Roche; and no thanks to him, thin, if we stay in our little cottage.'

'God grant that same, my dear,' said Cathal; 'but I'd like to set my own eyes on her ladyship before I give up my one lamb to her. Ah, Mr Edmund,' seeing him in the hall, 'I brought Joan as you desired me.'

'You are bringing the summer with you, though we are near mid-winter,' said Edmund, speaking in Irish. Whenever he was strongly moved, the colour and flame of the old language leaped out from his words. 'Welcome as the day, Joan and Joan's father! A sad house you come into. Have you the sun in your heart, Joan?' taking her hand a moment.

'I'll ask the Blessed Mother of God for it, if I haven't,' she answered, with a singular pride and modesty. 'Is the lady I'm to wait upon above stairs?'

'She is in the High Room,' said their conductor.

'Come, I'll let her know you are here.' He turned the rusty key in the wards with a grating sound, and when they were inside, locked the tower door again.

'"Bolts on her waist, and a thousand locks from that up,"' quoted the schoolmaster, 'tis so she should be kept and bound.'

'Will I be locked in with her between these four walls?' asked Joan of her father, a faint blush running over cheek and brow.

'Till Sir Philip is well and we know his wishes,' said Edmund, quickly. 'You will be his prisoner—not mine. That is the condition.'

'And if I'm in dread of what his mother would do to me,' she began, a little frightened, and then, recovering her native spirit, 'No, I won't be in dread, Mr Edmund. There's a God above all. But you mustn't yourself be laving the Castle till Sir Philip is cured. I take that promise from you.'

'And I give you my hand and word on it,' he cried. 'You'll see my shadow always about the place, if it isn't for an hour I'll be spending with your father in the school.'

'Let us go up, thin, in God's name,' said the girl. 'The stairs are dark, but the light is above them.'

'*Amin, a Thighearna!*' exclaimed Cathal, 'say no more; that's the best word slipped from you to-day.'

Both she and young Liscarroll respected the omen, and held their peace.

They were standing in the High Room, in nervous

expectation of the lady's entrance. She came with a proud step, always her mourning weeds about her—strangely dark and fair. Cathal made a most elaborate bow, while Joan rested motionless, fixed, as it would seem, by the wonderful beauty of this woman who bore so unhallowed a reputation. Their eyes met, in scrutiny, in a shy disquiet on one side, on the other in some slight embarrassment, not free from anger. Lady Liscarroll resented the comparison which she knew they were making between herself and this girl's low-born mother. Edmund was chastising her with scorpions.

But she took Joan lightly by the shoulder and laughed. 'Come to the window,' she cried impetuously; 'I want to see if you are as pretty in the light as in the dim recesses of this haunted old room. As pretty? You are the flower of the flock, my dear,' she continued, touching her cheek. 'She features you, Mr O'Dwyer. You see, I haven't fotgotten your name.'

'Thank you, ma'am,' said the schoolmaster, flattered against his good resolutions, and bowing to the ground, 'I'd say welcome home to your ladyship—and I do say it—but Sir Philip is suffering from a hideous fever that casts a gloom on us by its violence. We're baring our hearts to God for him night and day till he's over it.'

'I am told he is very ill,' she answered, darting a flash at her nephew. 'I remember you were famous

for your cures in the country round, Mr O'Dwyer. Try them now on Philip and bring me word how he is. I am a stranger in my son's house.'

'You won't be long so,' answered the impressionable schoolmaster, who came near forgetting, under the spell of words and looks he had never been able to resist, the bitter curses he had poured out on her sex in Edmund's hearing the day before. 'The Liscarrolls were noted always for their princely hospitality. Their door was never closed but against the wind. And everyone that came had new of all mates and ould of all liquors. Sir Phil is not behind his ancestors.'

'And that's how King Cormac judged the race of women,' said Edmund, sharply, in Irish, to this backslider.

Cathal started. 'In good works,' he said, speaking in the same language, discomfited, 'I'm no better than a fool; in bad I'm equal to the best. I should be a surly blackthorn to these reptiles since Sheila was taken from my head; and hear now how I am talking.'

Joan flamed up crimson, and Lady Liscarroll, who had no Irish, or only a few words to pass the time of day, caught Sheila's name distinctly. Her spirit could never be broken by what she deemed insult. 'You had a fine active wife, Mr O'Dwyer,' she said, with a straight look towards him, 'I hope she is living still.'

'She is living, I believe, but not in God's grace,'

answered Cathal, instantly, with an air of indifference. He was as stern as King Cormac now. 'If I remimber right, my wife wint North a little bit before your ladyship wint South. The swan loves the tide, and the wild goose flies with the wind, so I'm tould. And there's music that makes some weep, and some sleep, and some laugh. I'm trusting the laugh will be with yourself, my lady. But Joan having lost her mother so early, I was in hopes you'd feel for the poor *angashore*.'

The word touched a fibre not quite dead in the lady's bosom. 'I forgive your taunts, O'Dwyer,' she said, with more softness than she had displayed during the interview. 'Don't let me pretend I will be a mother to your girl—it would be affectation ; but she shall go back to you as harmless and unharmed as she came. Now, child'—to the silent figure—'tell me what are your accomplishments. Do you know how to read ?'

'Read, is it ?' interrupted the wizard, with a challenging laugh, 'Joan is the finest scholar in English and Irish I ever had in my school. And write ! But all the O'Dwyers—that great branch of the race of Heremon—wrote a hand like Columkille.'

'You are a genius, then, my dear,' said Lady Liscarroll, 'and you shall read to me while I stay mewed up in Loch Leven. But you never heard of Mary Stuart,' she concluded between a smile and a sigh.

'I would rather he spinning or knitting, my lady,'

said Joan, finding her voice at last. 'But if it will pass the time away, I can read a little to you. Don't mind my father; he thinks the world of me and my doings.'

'Why wouldn't I?' cried Cathal; 'have I chick or child but the one? Above all, my lady, make her sing to you. My sorrow, I'll not be there to listen. She has the most melodious little mouth in Munster, and a hundred ould songs between her lips.'

'Well, she shall sing them all, and spin till she has spun enough to make herself new clothes; my prison will not be so lonely,' said Lady Liscarroll. 'Edmund, I have never thanked you yet for your kind attentions. I thank you now from my heart.'

He made a slight inclination. 'And I thank Joan,' he said in his gentlest voice.

'You'll not pine and sicken without your ould daddy,' said Cathal to her, when he had taken ceremonious leave of the great lady, still in his eyes 'a formidable beldame,' but even so more human than his Sheila, the wild goose on the wing.

'I'll try not, father,' she answered in a tender aside; 'but whatever happens to me, we must make up the rent for Davy Roche before the hungry months are upon us. There's three gales due in May. That will strengthen me against heart-sickness, to know I am airning them.'

He knit his arms round her, and went heavily downstairs with his friend.

When they were gone, Lady Liscarroll said with an effort, 'I suppose you have no recollection of your mother, Joan? You were quite a child when—all that happened. You don't even know what she was like?'

'I remember two burning eyes; and a mournful little song used to be humming in my ears that I thought was mother's. But I don't rightly know. My father never lets a word slip about those times unless he's in great distress. I strive not to be thinking, myself, when there's no good in it.'

'You are a wise creature, my dear. Yes, those eyes are burning still in your own head—'

'God forbid!' exclaimed Joan, hastily putting her hand before the brilliant, tearful eyes that had been so disparaged—for praise she would not think it. 'Yet if it was as you say,' she added bravely, 'the fire could be quenched with fastings and quiet prayers. 'Tis the Almighty owns all at low tide and flood, and He turns the heart in aich one of us.'

Her lady was astonished, but kept silence for a little, after which she began once more. 'What was the song you used to hear humming about you? I should like you to sing it now we are alone.'

'Oh, I wouldn't for the world's wealth,' said Joan, shaking with fear. 'In the most part of those ould songs there does be enchantment. But, not to offend you, I could give the sense that is in it. They call it, I hear, "The Brow of the Red Mountain." 'Tis a

woman, and she sitting up—for I should say the song is in Irish—since the moon rose last night; she is putting down a fire on the hearth, while the people are in bed, "I'm by myself," says she, "the cocks are crowing, and all the land asleep but me." There is the beginning of it for you.'

'"All the land asleep but me,"' echoed her mistress in a half dream; 'I was that woman last night—many a night. Why did she sit up alone?'

'Oh, it was—I call to mind only a word here and there—hate that follows love in every place where beauty is on a woman, the song says. The boy left her, or she left the boy, I don't know which, on the brow of the Red Mountain; but, indeed, he was fond of money, and she had no fortune—so I'd say it was he turned from her. She can't get sleep or drink down her sorrow after that. There is more of it; but mother sang that much often to put me to sleep.'

'I am that woman,' repeated the Mary Stuart of Renmore to herself in a melting mood. 'This child—this innocent—is the first human being that has lightened my heart since the day at Wiesbaden. "And all the land asleep but me!" Ah, my little Joan,' she said aloud, 'songs have their enchantments. Pray you may never fall under them. Even your father, the wizard, could not release you. "And all the land asleep but me!" That is a wonderful word.'

So began the strangest friendship ever seen inside that Norman-Irish keep. A friendship quickened by

something which resembled hatred, lifted to heights of greatness by remembrance of the sins and sorrows without which it had never taken form or shape.

'What is your father's opinion?—what do the country-people think?—about my son?' she asked of Joan by-and-by. 'Is he much liked or more disliked? Speak without fear. To me it is indifferent what they feel, so long as they don't hold him cheap and despicable.'

'Oh, he is not despisable; no one ever said that of him.'

'But hated? Not worshipped and run after, as Nora O'Sullivan told me Edmund was. You mean he tramples them down and they resent it.'

'My father,' answered Joan, with a very musical low laugh, 'used to say there was a Firbolg chief somewhere in the pedigree of Liscarroll, and Sir Philip had his red hair and his short temper. And Edmund was one of the Tuatha De Danann—black and comely, a maker of songs and a true magician. But how would an English lady, the like of yourself, understand the differ between a Firbolg and a De Danann?'

'No, I don't. However, red hair and short temper are intelligible enough. Is Philip a—what did you call it?—a Firbolg in the eyes of young girls, too, Joan? In your eyes, for example?'

'I see him flash by on horseback, as if the wind was

carrying him, his scarlet coat blazing, my lady—and that's all I see. If I gave a name to him—but why should I?—'tis Finvarra, king of the fairy horsemen, I'd be calling Sir Philip. For he's here this minute, and away with him the next, in a dazzle of white sunshine, or of mist from the mountains, the horse's hoofs beating on the road. And inside the house of God no person ever set an eye on him.'

'Then he is strong, and fearless, and lonely. His father to the life! Is there any lady in the neighbourhood he might marry? Miss Julia Hapgood must be growing into a young woman by now.'

The girl looked up with a roguish smile at her mistress. 'Miss Julia is a horsewoman, and there's no fence would stop her, they say. She is often out hunting with the same pack of hounds that Sir Phil rides after. Would they make a match of it with the brush of the red dog between them? But we would sooner he married the brown-haired lady from Russia, Miss O'Connor, that they call—whist now till I say it—Lisaveta Carlovna. We do be often laughing at the droll name.'

'That wild Charlie O'Connor's daughter? But she was bred and born, as you say, in Russia; where is she now? Is Charlie dead?'

'He is, and her mother as well. She came over a year back to Airgead Ross, to Silverwood — the ould place of the family; by all accounts, she has millions to her fortune. Moreover, she is of the

Liscarrolls' religion; and Miss Julia, as the Hapgoods always, goes to church.'

'Let him take Lisaveta with her millions to the chapel, then, as soon as he leaves his sick-bed,' exclaimed Philip's mother, almost gaily.

'And if Miss Julia's heart was set on him, what should she do, poor thing?' said Joan, her fancy touched by this picture of love forsaken.

'She could not take the veil,' said her mistress, laughing; 'I think she would do well to break her collar-bone in St Brandan's Gap out hunting. Why do you fix your eyes on me, Joan, so reproachfully? You think me hard-hearted?'

'Sure, I know you are not in airnest, my lady. But'—speaking as if to her own thoughts—'was I fond of a boy and he to lave me, I'd follow him till water-grass grew in the heart of the fire. How could I let my secret love take up with another woman, had she all the goold from this to Lough Gur?'

They little knew that the woman with the gold—the brown-haired, pale-cheeked Miss O'Connor—was not far from them during their talk. Could they have pierced the grey stone walls of their prison, they might have seen her riding up to the hall door that very minute, as the sun was sinking, large, sad and fiery, into the Atlantic behind her.

'Miss O'Connor, as I am alive,' cried Edmund, when he caught the sound of her troubled voice outside. 'She has heard of Phil's accident.'

He ran into the air, took her bridle, and held the small sorrel from which she leaped down. Edmund's eyes were shining; not hard to tell that he was pleased.

'Ah, Miss Lisaveta, how could you ride over the hills—on Sunday, too? Not surely alone?'

'I left Yegor a mile behind,' said the girl, fluttering like a tall, brown-winged bird in her riding habit, and charmingly out of breath. 'Oh, how is your poor cousin? They brought such dreadful accounts.'

'Phil is in a bad way,' he said, 'not given up; I am sending to Cork for advice. He can see no person. But you will come in and rest. Do now.'

'A few minutes. There is Yegor, grumbling along. He will scold me. I never had such a task-master,' said Lisaveta; 'he is worse than a middleman to me.' Her face, even when she smiled, had a serious cast—melancholy under a ripple of sunshine. 'You forgive me for rushing down upon you without ceremony? I do like Sir Philip, you know I do, though he terrifies me in his grand, silent way. What a pity! What a pity! It *was* an accident?'

He gave her the story as he heard it from his cousin, but of what had followed hotfoot upon it no word.

'That is bad—his walking home, not knowing how. Had it been you, Mr Edmund,' with an arch smile, 'you could never have forgotten. Your brain is the liveliest part of you.'

'I am not without feeling,' he said, a little hurt.

'Mr Liscarroll! Did I insinuate? Why, Cathal O'Dwyer said, the last time I saw that miracle of learning—I was quite delighted and amazed—"'Tis God puts the fire in a man's head. When the heart and the brain are one thing, we have a poet like Mr Edmund."'

'Delight and amaze are worth seeing in you,' stammered the stricken youngster. 'I thank Cathal for his flatteries; poets live on honey.'

'Well, there's a hive of honey waiting for you. Publish and you'll see,' said the girl, taking off her hat to cool a flushed forehead, and displaying her brown locks with fine gold threads in them.

'That is Charlie O'Connor's eager, forward-looking gaze,' thought Edmund, 'but who could fathom a woman's heart?' He felt joyous, bashful, indescribably excited. Death was perhaps hovering over Renmore, ready to strike; and here was a dream of possible love and happiness singing at the window—a nightingale near his heart. 'Cruel and sweet, his hands reach down to hell,' said the schoolmaster of the terrible god. Edmund was ashamed. Happiness—and Phil lying that way upstairs?

The girl trifled with her hat and whip; sat down and rose up as if she must be going. 'How useless we all are when trouble comes!' she said softly. 'It is our weakness, according to Cathal, that we women are most in the way when we should be most out of it.'

'You are not in the way here, this evening,' said Edmund, under his breath.

'No? But I am lingering, in spite of Yegor's visible impatience at the window, because—because—You will not be angry with me?—'

His face burnt. 'What anger are you talking of?' he cried. 'Mine? It would turn in, I think, and be a knife in my side—here,' striking a hard stroke on his breast.

'I know, I know,' she answered kindly. 'Well, then, is it true that Sir Philip's mother came upon him out riding, and was the cause of his misfortune?'

'It is not true. But she is here. The country is talking, then?'

'The fear of that, Mr Edmund—am I not a good Irishwoman, now confess it, to be so quick at our people's language?—'twas that brought me over. I said to myself, "There's no creature in Renmore but those men, and what would they do with Lady Liscarroll? If they would allow her to stay with me at Airgead Ross, one trouble would be off their shoulders." Will it help you at all, Mr Edmund?'

He could hardly speak. The childlike courage, the dove's innocence—the contrast between Lisaveta and his guilty aunt—as if a white bird dashed its wings into the furnace; he had a thousand thoughts, and none of them to be uttered in so sunlit a presence. At length—

'She cannot come to you, and you must not go to her. There is a great gulf fixed.'

Only parables would shadow out these dark things of life. How could they bear allusion? But the girl broke in on his doubts and fears.

'You dread the country's gossip more than I do. It would be said that I had no sense of propriety? That you and Sir Philip had imposed on a stranger's ignorance, or on a helpless young woman? Have I a right, as the man said, to be slandered? Helpless? —ignorant?—well, I give the sense of propriety up to them, and welcome.'

'It cannot be,' returned the young man, with firmness, but softly as we refuse children something that would hurt them; 'you are managing Airgead Ross better than any landlord in the country; you speak more languages than we ever heard tell of; your arithmetic is infallible, and you could plead, like Portia, in the Four Courts of Dublin. But when Lady Liscarroll came in the door you might as well be lost, and Silverwood, too, in a dark Druidic mist for ever. You would be in one prison—the two of ye,' he ended with a quaint turn, to smother the bitterness of his saying.

'I am not convinced, and my heart is heavy, but—yes, Yegor, don't point in such despair to the red sun, we shall get home by moonlight. Mr Edmund, my last word. Airgead Ross stands open at all hours—I *invite* Lady Liscarroll. We meet—not Tuesday—

Friday, at the schoolmaster's. Give me your decision then, or before.'

She was away in the dusky sunset, towards the lone bare hills, which overhung the land on that side menacingly, her golden-brown hair sweeping in the wind. Edmund from the avenue looked long into the stormy sky.

CHAPTER VII

A HEDGE-SCHOOL

THE physician from Cork, whose name was up in the world, had met Dr Driscoll in consultation, examined Philip, pronounced his case dangerous, put a handsome fee in his pocket, and gone back on the mail-coach to Shandon bells. 'Should he recover,' said the wise man, gathering up Driscoll's loose but significant threads, 'your patient may be subject to melancholia, with or without delusions. His brain is deeply affected.' But to Edmund he simply approved of the local practitioner's treatment, and spoke of a long convalescence. Philip wasted; slept little; never opened his lips except when liquid food or medicine was poured through them. 'To be sick and sleepless is to call in Death,' said the wizard, in a passing word with Nora O'Sullivan, who tossed her head incredulously. 'Oh, if I had the poor *gommel* between my two hands, 'tis in a fine sweat and asleep he would put the night past. I forgot more Latin and Greek than those doctors ever learned; but of God's great store in field and meadow they know as much as the horned

cattle grazing on it. But if a man has no sheepskin and sealing-wax, he's a fool to them.'

So Cathal watched his opportunity, not doubting it would come. Edmund was in and out of the sick-room all day; every evening—a sour moment—he took such unpromising news as he had to the lady in the tower. She was nearly as yellow in the face as her son. Should he get over his illness, he might be violent with her; he was sure to make her smart by words that carried stings; but Edmund once in possession, she had not even this narrow, sea-beaten cloister, in which her life was daily fretted, to call her own. It seemed certain the Baronet would not live long. She braced up her nerves for a day more bitter than Wiesbaden. And Joan sang to her little snatches of old love ditties—old hunting songs half remembered; jovial, pathetic, in a sort of lullaby over the spinning wheel; but whatever she sang, the burden that Lady Liscarroll heard was like this from 'The Coolin,' that famous music, 'Thou hast found me, and hast bound me, and put grief in my heart.'

His cousin lying in an enchanted sickness, Edmund was loth to be from home. Yet on the Friday which followed the accident, he 'rose with a leap,' saddled and bridled, and was off to the high hills beyond the valley in which Renmore lay. There he would be idling when Miss O'Connor rode down to the school, where they ought to meet. This Irish gentleman had all the delicate courtesies of which his kinsfolk are

past masters—he could be punctilious; he felt shame, but defied it, in forcing on the lady a sort of assignation. What harm was he doing after all? And the curlews and plovers whistled, screamed and flew in the golden air; they had the sky and the bald pates of the hills to themselves, for no man but young Liscarroll was there to trouble them. But he, sauntering with loose rein, was fitting his sweet Celtic syllables to the poem of Moschus—a dainty bloom to draw butterflies—and he could look up innocently when she came in sight.

'Here I am out on you, like the Plaided Kern,' he said, a trifle confused, his eyes falling on the paper he held in his hand, 'shall I guide you this piece of the way?'

'I know it, though I was never at O'Dwyer's,' she answered, with the most natural air in the world. 'Go on, please; I will follow.'

He rode in front, shamefaced, silent. What a fool he had made of himself! Master Cupid was laughing at him out of the Greek; 'He's a demon to play on you,' it said in fine mockery. As for Lisaveta, her thoughts were not sentimental; these scenes, as they opened in the hollow, filled her always with sorrow and astonishment. 'We will stay on the hilltop,' she cried, and her cavalier halted.

'There is our village, spread out before you,' he said; 'the schoolhouse is that cabin which turns its shoulder to the wood.'

'How clear the day is after so much rain!' said she, lifting her eyes to the sky-line.

'Will you make a drawing of it in water-colours?' he asked.

'I may,' she replied absently.

'What points would you take in the view?'

'I will tell you what I see,' said Lisaveta, 'and if you are blind to it because you have seen it every day of your life, don't blame me.'

'A small dart, but it strikes to the marrow,' he returned, still at his Greek.

'So much the better. Attend now, and say if this is Renmore. First, a long, green glen, bare to the north, beautiful with hanging copse and covert in sheltered places; all that wood is on your estate?'

'On Sir Philip's'—he corrected the phrase.

'Very well, on the Liscarrolls'. Next, a silver snake, glittering as it runs to the sea. That is the Lonndubh. Away beyond—yet I could touch it from here—the green, foam-flecked Atlantic; it seems a floor we could race over, emerald scattered with snow. Above us, the sky is blue fire; and here,' pointing to it, 'your Castle sleeps in its forest, has its roots in the rock. Do I see what you see, Mr Edmund?'

'You have the eye of a painter; mine looks too often inward to be so bright. Well, imagine me to see all that. What's after?'

'Now look inward, downward, as you please; between these everlasting hills you and yours have

planted. What's after? A long, crooked, double row of cabins—or are they styes?—one storey high, not a line straight. Raddled like scabby sheep with red paint; smutched with foul rain out of that clean heaven! Heaps of foulness about the rickety doors, a stream of filth running by them. An ugly, mean, abominable picture, with God's world to shame it. That is the still life I discover. Am I wrong?'

He answered, with a shrug, 'They say it was always so; there's no help for these things.'

'Then the still-life quickens,' she went on, smiling. 'What do you say of the wonderful Dutch menagerie, Mr Edmund, in and out of the hovels?'

'Cocks and hens, goats and donkeys, swine of all ages and sizes,' he said gravely. 'Heaven send them increase! It is our natural history, which pays the rent.'

'Too natural. I am often of one mind with Mrs Cronin about it. Did you ever hear what she said to Father Falvey when he scolded her for not attending Mass?'

'I did not. But I know Jeremiah Cronin's account of his wife's eloquence to me. "You see, sir," said Jerry, "she has lost all her teeth and there's no bounds to her tongue." And how did she answer the priest?'

'"Yerra," said she, "lave me 'lone with the chapel. I have divils o' pigs, and divils o' poultry, and divils o' childer to be rearing, and unless I druv 'em into it

before me, I couldn't be there while I said the full of my beads."

'The divils o' childer are making a fine Donnybrook Fair of it down below at this moment,' said the poet, 'but they're the prettiest, wittiest and most lovable in the world. Their mischief is all innocence.'

'If so many of them wouldn't die young,' she answered, her eyes glistening with a certain dew. 'Look at the girls on the doorstep, or crossing the filthy puddles with bare feet. Half of them are in decline.'

'And their mothers are wrinkled hags at thirty. It is a world of starved creatures, better dead than alive—but who would pay our rents if they were dead?' he concluded sardonically, to keep down his sick heart; 'for God's sake, let us go to O'Dwyer's.'

'Have patience, my dear friend,' said Lisaveta, 'I must burn this picture into my brain. It is more frightful than our Russian villages, and, God knows, they are not gardens of Eden. Did you ever try to see all these lives at once? As a poet you should make the experiment.'

'You and I imagine it as it would be to us,' he argued.

'But they feel it. Why are the songs which you call their fairy music so tender and sad? Is it not the moan of despair?'

'Oh, there's the other—the rollicking sort; "Let us be drinking and courting the lasses." There's the

jig and the reel—and they marry young,' he added enviously.

'Reckless because they have no hope,' said Lisaveta.

'The Celt was born in April; he sees the April clouds and sun over him. I think mine the true story,' said Edmund, moving forward. 'If O'Dwyer is not at the school door, looking out for us! He will be rehearsing Cormac MacArt's sermon about women—for your good, Miss O'Connor!'

'What does Cormac MacArt say of us?'

'He would be a bold man that should tell you. Ask the Druid himself; but though Cathal twists his mouth against that fair defect of Nature, when she is out of earshot, I never knew him uncivil in her presence. He will answer with a *smig* on him, "the deer knows," and pay your condescension a compliment in six syllables.'

They had reached the mud cabin now—a building such as English country-folk call 'wattle and dab'—the walls of which smoked, a very limekiln, after the night's showers. Cathal, on the sunken steps, made them a graceful congee, worthy of his reputation as master of the country revels.

'Welcome and long life to the Lady of Silverwood!' he exclaimed, running out to help her down. 'And to you, Mr Edmund,' he continued, 'the blessings of all the Liscarrolls—love, valour, wit for ever, as Tom Moore has it. 'Tis a proud schoolhouse ye're entering this day.'

He soon had two little gorsoons—'white heads,' he called the fair-haired laddies—to walk the horses up and down, while Lisaveta and Edmund followed him into the smoky den. A couple of diminutive windows let the sunshine trickle across the blue air, in which the motes danced. There was no other ventilation. A few broken benches, the schoolmaster's high desk, a cupboard which held some torn volumes, and on the grimy wall a map of Ireland in faded tints. But the benches were crowded with boys and girls, who rose shyly to make their low bow, moulded on the master's, as the quality came in, and to cry, 'God and Mary with ye!' in answer to their 'God bless all here.'

'This, madam, is a hedge-school,' said Cathal, handing Miss O'Connor to his desk. 'But if 'twas one half as great in master and scholar as Andrew Mahony's (God rest him!) that taught me the classics, my Voster, and my Six Books, I wouldn't exchange it for the groves of Academe.'

'It has an earthen floor,' said Lisaveta, mischievously, declining with a gesture to ascend the rostrum.

''Tis pleasant and warm; had we the boards they would be wearing out,' said he.

'Ah, Mr O'Dwyer,' said the serious young lady, 'I am learning fast why you clever Irishmen don't get on in the world.'

'The Sassenach, the wet, the Broken Treaty—and our sins, God forgive us,' said Cathal, taking deep delight in his logical and exhaustive enumeration.

She shook her curls impatiently. 'No, and no, and no, I tell you again. It is your tongue that ruins you all. You have an answer to everything.'

'I believe it is so,' he said, 'the Sassenach left us only our tongues. All things else he took from us.'

'Are you answered now?' said Liscarroll, greatly amused.

'He would be a match for Yegor,' said Lisaveta, whose eyes had been making acquaintance with the children, and her lip smiling their way, during the argument. 'Now,' she went on, 'schoolmaster, two questions.'

He was bent at once in a formal, yet curiously courteous attitude. 'What is the reason,' she went on, 'that I could part your scholars into the fair and the dark? That boy has pale golden hair, cheeks that would vie with the apple-blossom, a white skin. The girl next him is almost, not quite, as pretty. But she might be a brown-skinned Spanish girl, selling oranges in Seville.'

'And they are first cousins,' he replied with a triumphant laugh. 'We ould Irish, including yourself, Miss O'Connor, have Spanish blood in our hearts; we are Milesians from the valleys of Biscay. The later-comers—we don't despise them, Mr Edmund—were Normans, fair and chivalrous. But the Saxons, the Cromwellians, they were worse than the sons of Lopus, plebeians to the bone. Look your fill on Richard Fitzgerald there, and his dark

cousin, Una Rahilly—those children should be in the Irish Book of Gold if we had one. What is your second question, ma'am?'

'Why have most of the children sore eyes? Why am I constantly meeting blind old men and women? They sadden me. But they were not born blind.'

The schoolmaster's eloquence had met with a check. 'I never gave a thought to it,' he said.

'Nor did I,' said Liscarroll, 'more shame for us both. Ah, you would soon find out, Miss O'Connor. Why do you put your handkerchief to those eyes of yours?' He had been watching her closely.

'It is the smoke,' answered Lisaveta, 'the sharp smoke of the peat.'

'Live in that smoke, year in, year out, in the dust or mud of a cabin, close as you can creep to the fire during our long winter months,' said Edmund to himself in a low tone—'my own eyes are getting purged, I think.'

'Then 'tis Davy Roche the middleman blinds the people,' cried O'Dwyer, striking his desk till it rang again. 'Davy and the like of Davy with their rack rints on us. Oh'—he broke into a towering passion—'oh, Davy, may the divil sweep out hell with you—and then burn the broom!'

'Whist, whist, my dear Cathal,' said his friend, soothing him, '*maxima reverentia debetur pueris—et puellis.* The children, man alive! the lady!'

'I humbly beg her pardon and theirs,' he returned,

wiping his forehead. 'But, surely, to take the eyes out of our heads with rack-rinting is an atrocity that cries to God for vengeance. Hell's flaming heart wouldn't be too hot for the man.'

''Tis after their oaths the women are at their best,' said Liscarroll, 'now do you be at your best after so mighty an invective'—the schoolmaster swelled out his feathers again. 'Can you gratify Miss O'Connor in the thing she came for?'

'Your soul to God! Is there a thing I wouldn't do for O'Connor's daughter?' cried Cathal, hoarsely; 'many and many's the time I had the privilege of your father's company—may he never want for the ambrosial cup this day in Heaven! Often he said to me, "O'Dwyer, I'll be the last of the roving blades; but we'll have the jug on the ground between us, in spite of that." Wisha, God be with ould times! No man has more respect for Father Mathew than myself; but still and all—'

'My father was sentimental and impulsive—the Irish April,' said Lisaveta, glancing not unkindly towards Edmund; 'my mother had a pretty name for him, she called him "the wood spirit"; and our peasants on the Volga were ready to face death if he lifted his finger. He roved far enough. It was his dying wish that brought me to Ireland, "to the fair hills of Erinn, O!"'

'What fun and dancing, wrestling and hurling, there used to be with him — and the songs and

stories after that—at Airgead Ross!' said Cathal, regretfully.

'My will is good to have them once more,' said Miss O'Connor, her eyes kindling, 'if it was but for his sake. Come over now at your free times to Silverwood, and help us. That is one thing I am asking, Mr O'Dwyer.'

'I am not as I was,' answered the schoolmaster, with a sigh; 'aches, and pains, and penury accompany ould age; but surely I'll do my share.'

'And could we keep the true May Day, Bealtaine, with its dances about the white thorn and every good custom, thanks to you,' Lisaveta continued, 'wouldn't your name and fame be equal to blind Heffernan's, William Dall, you admire so?'

''Tis a prospect would enrapture the great gods that sat on Ida's hill,' answered he, 'but one favour and grace I beg—Mr Edmund, you won't see me come short in the finer amenities of the entertainment?'

'I beg it, likewise Mr Liscarroll,' said the lady; 'you will revive the Feasts and Contests of Bards on my lawn—'

'And under your eyes,' said the young man.

'Brighter eyes shall do the honours of Silverwood—I will undertake for that. What says your song? "There are maidens would be mine, with wealth of land and kine"—those maidens shall look down on the lists, as in the Cour d'Amour. Is it a treaty?'

'Poets, wrestlers, dancers, and a fair May Day,' said her cavalier, in a taking of pleasure. 'Do you call that reforming our bad habits? I thought you would banish joy and be teaching us the Saxon trades.'

'As if joy were not the life, the crown, of all noble trading!' answered Lisaveta, with enthusiasm. 'I would never take from our dear people their merry heart — Cathal, *you* understand — the gold they earn must be fairy gold, which does not turn to dead leaves.'

'Had they the word of enchantment to the door of the fort!' he answered dejectedly.

'Mr Edmund has it. And you—the Druid, the teacher?—'

'Who is neglecting his Trojans,' said Cathal, 'and they like a crowd of starlings, greedy of beak, sharp of claw, to seize all we're saying. Go home now with ye, children; I give a holiday in honour of our illustrious visitors. Out with ye, every one.' The school emptied in a second.

'Now till May Day we three are in strict alliance,' said Miss O'Connor. 'Then we will keep it in great style. You shall be our magician, and throw over us the glamour of Tara's high days.'

'I'll have the chain of silence shaken, silver and iron, to keep order,' said Cathal, dancing a step in his delight; 'that's the drum-step, my lady, and not a man from this to Limerick could dance it as firmly. You tell me I am a Druid. Well, I

will bind ye with the wizard's knot, and make ye all turn as it goes round ye.'

'The wizard's knot?' said Miss O'Connor.

''Twas an enchantment put into hanks of yarn by the wise man or the wise woman, to keep the place safe and sacred where it would be tied, and to bind under bonds every soul it was laid upon. Not Fionn MacCumhal himself could stand up to it. You never heard tell of the Cave of Keshcorran, and the three hags that "upon three crooked and wry sticks of holly hung as many bewitched hasps of tow, reeling it off left-handwise" to put on Fionn a deadly tremor when he was caught in it. But I would put on ye a tremor of joy,' said he, looking at them significantly.

'We are in your hands,' said she, laughing; 'you, Mr Edmund, bring your poets and poetry.'

'If Philip comes round,' he said, hesitating, upon which they felt the morning with its gracious lights was overcast.

'We'll cure him yet, with God's help, had he nine times as many doctors,' cried O'Dwyer. 'Leeches they may well be denominated—the blood-suckers. Will they never be taught that the sight of blood is to God and the sun an abomination?'

It was a fair stroke at the crimson methods of the day in those backward districts, and raised a smile. None there could have told what depths of ancient superstition they were looking into.

'But a word with you, Mr Liscarroll,' said the girl. 'Good morning, schoolmaster. My compliments to Joan. Where is your dark *cailin?*'

'She is above at the Castle,' answered O'Dwyer, vaguely, his eye seeking the ground. ''Tis helping Nora O'Sullivan she is.'

When they were outside, before mounting, Lisaveta put her query to Edmund. 'When does your aunt come to me? I wish it, you know.'

He gave a deep sigh. 'I might tell you she can't leave my cousin—a falsehood.'

'Which you are not the man to utter. Then she accepts?'

'I have to think of you, Miss O'Connor, and for you. It is impossible.'

'Say no more,' she answered with some sharpness, yet with melancholy in her tone. 'You regard me as the young person, who cannot be trusted to brave talk and silliness when there is something to do.'

'The world's opinion is not silly.'

'I despise it,' she said, 'so will you, or you are not the man I took you for. But I have done. Good morning, Mr Worldly Wiseman.'

As he rode home, the youth finished his Irish construe of Moschus. The last verse had a sting: 'Touch not his wily gifts, for all are hot from the furnace.'

'Ay, that's true,' he said to himself, 'but I've gripped them hard. Too late!'

CHAPTER VIII

THE MIST AND THE STREAM

But if Edmund had full confidence that the maid of Airgead Ross cared a bit for him—which he had not—he would have told her what a Banshee of wailing and ill-presage moaned in the High Room at Renmore. His heart was bruised and broken, like ice on deep waters—the rainbow-gleams, in which his first youth wandered musing, sank into the thunder-cloud. At such a time, dull in spirit, alive to every stroke of sorrow, he felt adness in all that the Russian girl had made him see with her clear eyes, while they scanned the village from above—ay, even while his words rang against hers. The fine purple of his dreams fell to ashen-grey; Philip weighed heavy on his arms, cold as a corpse. He would have given the succession of Renmore estate to save him, without a second thought. Hardly because he was fond of his cousin—he did not know whether to like Phil or let grow up in himself that secret displeasure which the Celt cherishes in silence under civil speeches, where something holds back his affection,

as the north wind holds the rain. No, but if he died, the village gossip would come true; Lady Liscarroll's venomous eye would have murdered her son.

How was Philip to get his quiet sleep, on which recovery depended? The days went over him, always speechless, but with unclosed eyelids; Dr Driscoll prescribed; the famous Cork physician earned another handsome fee; the patient, speaking once—but it might be his delusion that spoke—muttered to Nora O'Sullivan, 'I am looking at a swift stream that broadens and broadens; when it flows into the red mist beyond, I am a dead man.'

The nurse hushed him with tender words, and carried this fine image, or vision, to Edmund. At his evening report in the High Room he whispered it with a fall in his voice, thinking to prepare the woman who walked to and fro incessantly between the seaward-looking window and the door, caged but untamable. 'When the mist meets the stream,' she said, quivering, 'you will suffer me to be there—you will, Edmund?'

'Now you might,' he answered; 'it is Driscoll warns against a possible shock. Otherwise—'

Her reply was decided. 'While there is a chance I will not go down. They would say my looks were poison to him, if anything happened. But the red mist is an old sign in his family'—she was careful not to say 'in ours.' 'Haven't you

heard Sir Walter talk volumes on the Liscarroll death-tokens? That is one of them.'

'Perhaps Philip heard his father talking, and now fancies it. Then you—if I send, you will—it will not be too intolerable a pain?'

She smiled and dropped her lip, with an anguish he had never yet seen on the haughty features. 'When my son shut me into this tomb the bitterness of death was past.'

No, it was yet in store. Philip began to babble all day of the mist and the stream. Seven weeks after November Eve, when a great fall of snow promised a white Christmas, and no bird sang in the boughs of Renmore, he took a turn from silence to the same words ever—'The mist and the stream—the mist and the stream.' Said Nora, his foster-mother, the tears running down, 'Isn't it mournful the case he is in? My long sorrow that no doctor can heal or cure him.' And she thought, but refrained from saying, 'If I was to tell Cathal O'Dwyer now, what harm would he do to give a cast of his hand over the bed?'

She let a sly word fall in Joan's hearing, delicately stained with one tint of imagination. 'Mr Edmund would be heart-broken not to call for the Druid's skill and knowledge was there good in it,' which Joan, meaning no evil, quoted to her father on his next appearance. A victorious light came into his green-grey eyes.

'Let Nora lave the door to me,' he said; 'had I five minutes' clinical observation of the symptoms, I'd brew Sir Philip a potion as miraculous as Hippocrates or Galen ever composed. Tell the woman I'm here in expectation.'

Then his scorn was poured out on Driscoll. 'That much,' he cried, snapping his fingers, 'for the man of medical science, with his sublimates, his steel, his drugs and the whole of his paraphernalia. Glory be to the Almighty—as long as the fox is running, he's caught at last. To the poor Druid he must come down, though it sticks in his gizzard. But let me clap eyes on the patient they are maltreating.'

Nothing loth, Nora left the door as she was bidden, and Cathal stole in on tip-toe. From behind the bed-curtains he watched Sir Philip with an eye as bright as a hawk's, while the endless phrase turned on itself—'The mist and the stream—the mist and the stream.'

'If it was a windmill, his tongue couldn't be going faster,' said Nora, 'and his pulse—feel it yourself—do be bating, bating, day and night as quick.'

'I'll put a stop to both of them,' answered Cathal, with supreme assurance. 'But hould, woman, till my prognostics are concluded.'

The word was made to silence her. O'Dwyer, charlatan or wizard, continued peering into the open eyes and face of the invalid, felt his pulse and his

heart repeatedly, and went through all the rites of the professional artist, solemn as a Red Indian. He tasted the physician's draught and shook his head mournfully. 'I needn't inquire for a disease but this,' he said to Nora, in a tragic aside. 'At what hour does Mr Edmund be visiting her ladyship in the High Room?' he asked, when his long and minute examination was over.

'Between seven and eight at night,' said the nurse.

'Now, Nora, we're ould friends and neighbours,' said he, 'and you wouldn't see me wronged. Whatever we do for Sir Phil, the doctor must not know it.'

'I'll take every book, shut and open,' said Nora, 'to keep it from him.'

''Tis prudent, also, to lave Mr Edmund in the dark, so as he wouldn't be answerable to Driscoll or the Corconian if our medicament failed—a thing it will not.'

'Give me your orders, and you needn't fear me,' said the ancient woman, dominated by his fame as a fairy doctor, but still more by his resolute bearing.

'I must have twenty-four hours, and be out in the moon, as long as she shines this night, to collect the medicinal herbs and steep them according to the rules o' knowledge. To-morrow night, before seven, do you call down my daughter from the tower, and let her be waiting for me in the clump of hazels near the *reilig*. The remainder will be my duty. I won't be seen in the business, good or bad, however.'

'But if he was to die in the night?' she asked. 'I'm in dread when he's tired of talking he'll get death that minute. Listen to him now.'

'In less than one turn of the sun and one of the moon I couldn't heal a sick man, though I got Ireland for it. The fall of snow is bad for me, too. Don't let him die, nor do you think of it; but put your life itself into him till Joan comes from me to-morrow at the hour appointed.' He paused and made the sign of the cross on himself, on her, and over the insensible patient, saying in a deep whisper, 'I bind him to life; I bind you to silence; young man, wait for me—woman, put seven locks on your tongue. In the name of the strong angel that houlds the sword!'

He went on tip-toe out of the room, and, after writing a word to be given in to Joan with her mistress's dinner, betook him to his gaunt old cabin, where he spent some hours alone. A neighbour came to the door, but could not get an entrance; neither was there any that answered her loud and vehement callings. The saucy village gorsoons crept round to see what their schoolmaster was doing, with a delighted fear that if he opened and ran out upon them they would catch a glimpse of the familiar spirit—black cat, or blacker demon—which, they made sure, was sitting beside him on the hearthstone. But O'Dwyer gave little heed to the breathings about his threshold or the spurts of smothered

laughter; he did not hear them, probably. His whole soul was wrapt in deep cogitation, while his corded hands, brown and withered, were busy in mixing herbs after prescriptions which, as he believed, came down through long centuries from the fairy-doctors of the Tuatha De Danann. In secret bundles, hid under the thatch, he kept these potent herbs, gathered in their season—marsh marigolds, primroses, yarrow, eyebright, vervain, St John's wort, and many more. They had each their hidden virtues, quickened by prayers sung over them to a weird chant, and in a mixture of Christian language with Pagan ceremonies. But, seemingly, this afternoon, the charm was not complete. O'Dwyer sat down, at last, in a silence which not even prayer interrupted, waiting for night and the moon.

What followed was never clearly ascertained. That he left the fire burning—a precaution against wandering ghosts—locked up the house, and sallied forth into the snowy woods, returning no man's salute, those few could avouch who met him. Few they were, since the Irish peasant is convinced that after nightfall, 'outside the house is for the dead, inside for the living.' It was Cathal, or Cathal's likeness, bent on a dubious errand; in either case he would not answer their challenge as he was going the road. Whither and what to do?

On this head many spoke many things. The lights and shadows of an hour when the moon sails

above thick tree-tops, glancing on a wild torrent like the Lonndubh, catching up gleams from the ocean to scatter them far and wide in endless reverberations, are full of mystery. Was it O'Dwyer that went stooping by the gnarled roots along the stream, as if in search of fairy plants to compose the healing draught? Not unlikely. Or did he stand colloguing with a crooked old body—man or woman; perhaps something worse—under the inviolate hawthorn which grew upon the lis of Renmore, while the moon went into a cloud? Did he, whispered others, shivering yet not without a thrill of admiration at his bold deed, open the Black Book itself? Though Cathal was known to be good-natured—a white wizard, famous for extraordinary cures—his two hands might be of different colours. Lisaveta, viewing the new world into which destiny had brought her with unjaundiced eye, once uttered this truth: 'It is a people secret and suspicious beyond any God has made.' His neighbours liked O'Dwyer—and suspected him; but the latter in their silent hearts. A good man—for his convivialities were no sin to their thinking—he had power with the fairy-folk and knew their ways; but were he out now, 'in the merriment of the cold wind,' some mischief devising, they would only like him the less and dread him the more.

Some, therefore, talked of the spell he had to call Donn Firinne, king of the Munster fairies, from

his castle under Lough Gur, into any place, however far off, he might choose. Others—among them certain old hags upon whom he had put a caustic word—said the Black Man was nearer to him than the Brown—'Donn' is that colour in Gaelic. But when the event came to pass which startled the country twenty miles round, all were certain they had known of the tremendous and fateful charm wrought that snowy night by Cathal in the moonlit woods. His shadow, single or double, going about till the sun rose and drove him home, flitted through copse and brake years afterwards, when he was mingled with the clay. A night of power, the wizard's moon glaring down upon it, malignant, unwholesome!

Thus they. And whatever Cathal came out to do, we may be sure he did that thing. If to gather herbs of health, he took them home with him; if on a business more fell and daring, his smile as he undid his cabin door betokened its accomplishment. The rest of the day which followed he spent in school; but the lessons were sharply given, and boys and girls, hearing his first words, knew with their quick Irish fancy they must let the master alone that morning. He had not broken his fast by so much as a draught from the little still he kept, 'unknown to the gauger.' Nor would he until the potent brew he was putting down at the fire had left his hands; for it was no

vile apothecary's concoction, but true *aqua vitæ*, into which the fairy-doctor must fling his own soul.

Joan, the innocent, had her instructions. Dusk fell, and she was waiting among the hazel-trees, cold in a bitter blast. Her father, his patched cloak hiding what he brought, came stealthily along, cautious not to break a twig, hardly venturing to crush the freezing powdered snow. They met without a word. After a while he inquired about Philip. 'Is the life in him yet?'

'It is, but as a rushlight blowing backwards and forwards at the door. Nora believes he'll not put the night past. Father Falvey was there this afternoon to do what he could for him.'

'Does the tongue be ever going to the same tune?'

She assented hastily. 'Let me in again, father. Lady Liscarroll will be asking for me.'

'Don't mind her,' he answered. 'But now put this under your shawl, in the name of God. Go from me without turning your head or looking back, whatever thing screeches to you; but away with you, Joan; bate up to the sick-room, and with your own hand give the drink in nine sups to Sir Phil. Thin tell Nora to burn what I left yesterday. I'll come for news to-morrow early.'

With a gesture of command, he put into her hands an ancient flask of gold beaten thin, ornamented with the curious snake-lines, twisted fantastically, which we

have admired in Irish illuminations. It was treasure-trove dug out of a bog, not yielded up to Government, and worth far more than its owner suspected, but by him unsaleable. Showing her how to undo it, 'Go before you now,' he said, 'and for your soul don't look to right or left till you are in the house.' With these admonitions he departed, stealing away as he came.

The girl's heart throbbed violently; a murmur as of low voices began to sing in her ears. Leaves rustled; snow fell in sparkling and blinding sheets from the branches upon her; a hare ran across her path, and some wild thing flew into her face, as she ran breathless up to the castle. The wind thickened, the woods roared; a great sound of the sea troubled her, but still she ran. At the hall door she was on the point of stumbling, in such headlong haste did she flee from those voices which muttered low, 'Turn back, turn back'—the trees, the wind, the sea, were after her, like hands touching her hair in the stormy blast. But she did not stumble, and once within doors her courage mounted. 'Sure I am a hare myself to be in dread of one,' she thought reproachfully. ''Tisn't that I should be minding, but what I have in my fingers. Good now, Joan, do as you said you would.'

She was standing at the door of the sick-room. A light burnt at the stair-head, and she paused in front of it. Her beautiful face, wet from the snow, took a grave expression. 'I won't give him a thing

I don't take first,' she said, opening the flask, which yielded a strange thymy smell, powerful as some Eastern scent, but more natural, as it were. Joan blessed herself devoutly and put the flask to her lips. It held a strong essence, for eyes and mouth resented it, as they might smelling-salts, and in not many seconds a pervading warmth, accompanied by profuse perspiration, declared its efficiency, while no symptom of a threatening nature followed. 'I can give it now,' reasoned the girl; 'if it harms the one of us, the other will be no better.' The thought gleamed in her eyes, which had an intense brightness when she entered Philip's room.

The nurse, expectant but downcast, whispered, 'The priest and the doctor have given him up. Make haste now; your lady will be here before long. Mr Edmund gave orders to be ready for her any minute.'

Philip's voice had sunk, with frequent pauses, but never kept still. When the nurse made him sit up, he turned his unmeaning eyes towards Joan, who was near the bed, her countenance glowing with a life which radiated in pity and tenderness upon the wasted man, stricken to death so mysteriously. Nora O'Sullivan supported him, and the draught was administered nine times without mishap, its odour filling the room. 'Now burn those things my father left with you,' said the girl, putting into her bosom the thin gold flask. They were powders

or dust of some kind, for they crackled in the fire and a smoke as of incense rose from them.

No trace was discernible of the thymy odour which characterised the healing draught. 'I can say it was incense,' remarked Nora. Her companion said nothing. She had become one anxious gaze, forgetful of her mistress, daring the chance of discovery; all her mind concentrated on Philip's worn lineaments, which seemed to be working under emotions as obscure as they were mighty. A struggle had begun in him; he tossed and groaned like a man whose pain is intolerable. Her own excitement wrought some fever into the spectacle; she hardly knew whether she was drunk or sober. 'He'll die and I'll follow him,' was a thought that flashed through her brain.

All at once he began crying, 'Oh, mother, the red mist—oh, mother, the red mist!'

'Och, great God o' grace,' cried Nora, 'the hand of death is upon him! 'Tis your father poisoned him —the thief o' the world.'

'Then I'll die poisoned, too,' said Joan, throwing up her hands in momentary despair. 'I drank the same drink before giving it.'

The nurse's eyes remained fixed on this strange girl in awe and uneasy admiration. 'What made you do that?' she whispered.

'To prove my father was no poisoner,' said Joan O'Dwyer, proudly.

The struggles of Philip called them to his bedside again. 'Oh, mother, the red mist—oh, mother, the red mist!' he cried as at some overpowering vision.

'Run, Joan, run to the tower, call his mother—call Mr Edmund. Let them be here now, would they see him alive. Oh, Joan, run with ye.'

It needed none of these incitements to set her off. The girl, her limbs trembling, her lips and brain on fire, was flying along the interminable steps, up to the High Room. She flung the door open without knocking and ran to Lady Liscarroll; but, panting like a hunted deer, she could only gasp, 'He's dying—dying—the red mist is there.'

'Now,' said the unhappy mother, nerving herself as for execution, 'Edmund, come. I am at last free.'

They rushed down in a tumult of hurrying feet. Joan followed, still clasping the gold vessel which was to prove her crime and bring it home if he died—and the mist of doom had begun to fall over him. Entering the sick-chamber, she thought it was full of lights, amid which Philip's ghastly face and staring eyeballs fascinated her as in some sacred picture. His red curls framed it uncannily—a face never to be forgotten. Had she poisoned him with her magic golden flask? The heart within her was bursting.

Philip sat up without assistance, stretching out pallid hands for water. The flame of thirst was consuming his inwards. Lady Liscarroll held a glass to her son's lips, from which he drank eagerly; but

he suffered still. They were all in that horrible agony where the lookers-on are torn with a useless compassion, imbecile in the presence of a pain it cannot relieve. Edmund took his cousin's hand with a firm grip; Nora and Joan dared not exchange glances, but their consternation was so visible that the slightest accident would have betrayed the secret which was rending their conscience. 'What have you been burning?' asked Edmund, detecting a singular flavour in the atmosphere.

'A few small grains o' blest incense,' replied Nora —her companion blushed—'incense, sir, to sweeten the air.'

It satisfied him as he knelt, watching the waves of suffering mount and fall, every throb appearing so violent that even Lady Liscarroll hoped it would be the last.

But hour thrust on hour, wearily, and the last was not yet. Philip sat up or bent forward, shaken by a power which held him in unseen bonds, which might have been thought to play with its victim, searching out every nerve with the skill of a practised musician upon the strings. How long could he endure?

That question poor Joan addressed to her heart, wondering if the deadly mixture would have its effect in her own case, almost angry that she felt nothing but a glow and a quickened circulation, hateful in its unlikeness to Philip's agonising struggles. A sense of pity, infinite as her remorse, took hold of

the girl; rather than let him die on these coals of fire, she would confess—say it was her doing—throw down the flask before them as the proof of her guilt. But what would they do to Cathal? The anguish of this doubt sent her tottering across the room to a couch where she fell prone, her thoughts one lurid tempest; the others, except Nora O'Sullivan, took no notice, absorbed in the death-bed. Nora was making vows to all the saints, and pilgrimages in her own mind to every holy well; but her tongue was tied.

A little more, and Joan had certainly confessed, when she heard Sir Philip speaking with a voice new to her, though weak and even yet dreamy. He was calling Edmund. 'Do you see the red cloud moving off?' he inquired.

'Where?' answered his cousin, joyful but incredulous.

'That way,' said Philip, pointing to the window.

When the girl heard these words, she sprang up and came towards the bed. There were numerous lights in the sick-chamber, which cast on her as she stood erect a vivid gleam. The young man's eyes were arrested by an apparition he had never seen, rising out of his fever's red mist. He sat still, examining her face with a grave curiosity, which she could not help feeling too. They might have been alone in the universe, so utterly were the others blotted out. A long, deep gaze from his lately vision-haunted eyes was answered by one as long and as

deep, but more uncertain, from hers—the supreme moment had arrived. They were all conscious of it, and hung on the sequel.

'Tell me who that child is?' he said, turning to his cousin.

'She is Joan O'Dwyer, the schoolmaster's daughter,' replied Edmund.

'I am not dreaming?' he asked.

'No, thank God! It is Joan you see, and Edmund you are talking to.'

'And I am here,' said Lady Liscarroll, coming forward, 'your mother, Philip.'

A deep sigh broke from his lips. 'You—yes, it is you,' he said despondently. 'I remember. Ah, I am not in a dream.'

'Oh, surely not, sir,' cried Joan, overcome by joy and thankfulness; 'you have left the red mist behind you, please God.'

'The mist is gone, and you are in its place,' he said with a childlike simplicity of tone. 'I saw it roll away, then I saw you. Will you—will you stay till I am all right?'

'As long as I can do you good, sir,' she said fervently.

'I will stay, too,' said his mother, 'stay to nurse my son.'

'Yes,' he answered with cutting indifference, 'what else could you do? You are my mother. But in the High Room—not here. Edmund, I gave you a charge—in the High Room, I say.'

He was getting excited again. 'I will go,' said the lady, her eyes telling what she suffered, but no other sign of emotion visible. 'I am satisfied now my son lives.'

'And will live,' said Joan, making as to go with her.

But Philip called to the girl. 'Wait, you must not leave me. Keep the red mist away.'

Edmund took his aunt back to her prison. The other women sat up till morning in Philip's room, and saw him sink into a dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER IX

FANCY PAINTING

THIS was that amazing cure of Philip Liscarroll, destined to have such consequences for all concerned. Ó'Dwyer's 'Eleleu' of triumph may be imagined. 'And so,' he cried, smiting his thigh in ecstasy when his daughter announced it, under the hazel branches where she had taken from him the wonder-working draught, 'and so the ould wizard can do what the omniscient leviathan of science from Cork, let alone Driscoll, the horse-doctor, could not do—they must give it up to him! Rare as the gold is of that serpent-adorned flask—but keep it, *alanna*, 'tis better with you than me—I'd bestow it willingly to taunt and gibe at these sons of Æsculapius and make a holy show of the two of them.'

''Twould not be lawful nor right,' answered Joan, tremulously. 'Between ourselves and Nora the secret must remain.'

'I'm not to acquaint Mr Edmund with my finest miracle? For a miracle it is all out. What would he do to us?'

'He's the red lightning itself if he do be vexed, and

Nora bid me warn you he gave no permission for the cure; 'tis letting on she was.'

Cathal groaned aloud. 'Until hell be heaven, until the sun hide his light, until the stars fall from the sky, women will remain as we have stated! True for you, Cormac MacArt, true for you. But still, he is cured.'

'Would they allow it was the drink I gave that healed Sir Philip?' said Joan. 'They would sooner see him laid out any day—I mane the doctors and the quality. You'd get a bad name, father, and I'd be driven from the Castle—and my white shillings, I might go look for them in the Pool a Phouka.'

He rubbed his forehead with a wise finger. 'Had I a thumb to bite like Fionn MacCumhal, I'd know what was to be done next,' he said. 'But I will maintain against all pill-compounders, mercurial adepts, and blood-suckers, that they never healed a man fairy-struck, as I did.'

'Sir Phil came by his hurt that way?' inquired Joan, weaving about the young master a web of romance into which many golden threads were shot.

Her father nodded his grey head energetically. 'Leaping the fence of Rathmorna he got the hurt,' said Cathal, 'in the first week of November when the fairy-power is strong. There's not a metal that is dug, nor a plant that grows, would make him all smooth again but the herbs of price and virtue I administered. Will I hould my tongue on it for your

sake, Joan? But if I do, the thing itself will let a screech out of it. For, by rights, the sick man should be under the sod now.'

The schoolmaster guessed shrewdly. Eyes had been watching Renmore Castle, tongues had wagged in many mouths, since the hour which brought Philip home in a trance and was followed by his mother's apparition at dead of night. A complication of events so tragic was not made for silence. Dr Driscoll and his wife hinted a thousand times more than they spoke. But the legend was growing of a son on his death-bed who rose to lock the tower doors behind which his wicked mother was kept in durance, and from which she had attempted to escape, when he thrust her back again. In that lawless fold of the country between hills and sea, such things had taken place—the shadowy ruins, caves of ocean, glens concealing deep, murderous lakes, had their stories, a red mark across them, of abductions, imprisonments, disappearances sudden and final. Who could say what Lady Liscarroll had done? or what would now be done to her? Round the cabin fire strange possibilities were argued by a people in love with the marvellous, who mixed worlds seen and unseen into an alchemist-cloud of many-coloured vapour. In mansions where the lady had formerly visited, her guilt and her son's shame were often touched upon in the endless keys of human feeling—earnest, light, satirical, sympathetic. Friends inquiring about

Philip at Renmore looked up curiously towards the High Room, but never set eyes on the supposed captive. That she was living Dr Driscoll knew and asserted, with an undercurrent of suggestion—'How long? The raven might inform us that sits croaking above her head, poor woman!'

'You don't tell me, doctor,' said Mrs Hapgood of Derryvore, rustling her silks and fingering her massy gold chain, 'that her son and his cousin—haughty young men both—would take the life of that sinful woman?' Mrs Hapgood was not a sinner herself, and could pile a cairn of stones upon her erring sister's head, in Christian charity.

'Murder, ma'am, is an actionable word,' answered Driscoll, sucking his smoky lips; 'I wouldn't say myself that Lady Liscarroll was under lock and key. But give her a morning call,' he went on, laughing boisterously, 'and see if they'll let you in.'

The virtue of this lady, which some called brazen, took alarm. 'I shall pay no visits at Renmore till that woman quits the house or clears her character,' said she. 'As soon as I was told of her arrival, I laid my commands on Julia to have no more dealings with Nora O'Sullivan, though she is an old servant of ours, married from Derryvore.'

'And Master Will—what is he to do? If Sir Philip had a friend, it was your son,' said Driscoll, going on with his joke.

'Master Will can take care of himself,' replied his mother; 'a lone woman like me, Dr Driscoll,' sighing pathetically, 'has little influence over these wild young men.'

'I think Lady Liscarroll an injured person,' said the doctor, rising to leave; 'Mrs Driscoll regards her as I do and always did. Anyhow, she has no right to be in prison without a magistrate's warrant—if 'tis in prison she is. Now Sir Philip has got the better of his illness—thanks to me, you say, ma'am? Well, we won't boast, maybe such a recovery is creditable to a poor country surgeon—but he is nearly over it, and we'll surely get light on the inside of Renmore.'

'I should wish it for all our sakes,' said Mrs Hapgood. But that she meant Julia to become a virtuous Lady Liscarroll and reduce the impenitent to mere dowagership was no secret to the doctor; on the string of that maternal ambition he had been playing all the while. He delighted in setting dogs to fight and people by the ears. The Baronet was getting well; Driscoll, therefore, felt no scruple in hating him worse than ever.

As for Master Will Hapgood, he was a powerful young fellow of two-and-twenty, with sparkling black eyes, a black head of bushy hair, a fresh complexion and big bones, and he was as wild as a colt. His sister, Julia, the hoyden, took after him—she was large, dark, hot-tempered, unmanageable. The lad's voice had a quarrelsome note; Julia softened it

to girlish vivacity, but showed her white teeth a little too often for perfect breeding. Their mother read the Bible, sowed tracts broadcast, was justified in her own eyes, and always spoke as if Derryvore lay in Tongataboo. Her children read nothing whatever, coaxed and petted their horses, lived in or about the stables half the day, rode at a breakneck pace, and chose their friends on the hunting field. Sport is a passion in Ireland, not a pastime; in Will's case it had its complications of drinking, card-playing, going to fairs and races, and regretting that he could not exchange shots with a neighbour when his blood was up. He would have envied Phil Liscarroll his horsemanship had envy been Will's fault; he did not grudge him Julia's hand in prospect, though Renmore was bled white by long leases still to run out, and its encumbrances almost broke its back. So they were Phil and Will as youths are wont to be; and there did not exist the slightest confidence between them. Phil kept his mind to himself; Will had hitherto none worth keeping. He was a centaur without brains, galloping through life in a steeplechase.

Julia, nettled but obedient, had ridden in the opposite direction to Renmore since that unlucky November night. Her brother called every week, sat with Edmund, but could not be admitted to Phil's darkened chamber. As he passed in and out, voices crooned their mysterious tale of the lady in

the old Castle, solitary, with a cloud upon her fair face; the beauty of this woman, injured or injuring, was common talk. Will had never seen her since childhood; but he remembered her vividly, and with a boy's gratitude for something she had once done to comfort him in a desperate trouble. He was waiting to offer such help as the situation might demand; his sister's future was perhaps at stake, but a witching image of some lovely evil creature floated into his imagination when he glanced at the tower, and came across his rare dreams. Strict bringing up had given him a surfeit of the Catechism —yet it was rather his dull fancy that shook itself at the unusual, the dramatic strength of a figure revealed in beauty and loneliness.

Of all which Will Hapgood was profoundly unaware, though it had begun to act upon him, as a slow fire sweetens malt, by imperceptible degrees. His mother's readiness to believe the worst made him incline to welcome that worst, as not so bad after all. Driscoll, on the other hand, irritated his curiosity by hints and surmises in the lady's favour, tending to accuse her late husband of moody indifference towards his wife, and her son of a harshness that seemed not unlike Sir Philip. The High Room with its inmate put on a clear and solid appearance, almost theatrically distinct, in the lad's mind. Had it been a play he would certainly have taken tickets for it.

He was fated to get free admission, unless

payment should be asked when the curtain came down—which happens outside the theatre pretty often. 'On a day of the days,' mild and spring-like, a breeze drawing exquisite patterns on the light-blue surface of ocean, the sun ducking and diving among silver-weed cast about the sky, Will Hapgood was fishing a little way out in the long, indented Firth of Renmore. His boatman, expert at this game, we know already; he was that Felim O'Riordan who, had poor Joan but a cow's grass, would, in his own opinion, have been matchmaking with her long ago. The salmon-trout were greedily devouring the sweet bait; these two youths had made their haul and were happy under the fair sky, the caressing breeze—rightly tuned if Love came down along the strand or leaped into their skiff. They spoke little—what need to speak?

While they were thus fishing happiness to themselves from the great deep, it chanced that Felim sent his long sight into the air, vacantly, for the pleasure of a spectacle so vast. Suddenly it was arrested. 'What are you looking at, O'Riordan?' asked Hapgood.

'Do you see the ould tower of Renmore?' he answered, his eyes still uplifted.

Will gave a glance that way. 'People on the roof,' said he, 'surely not strangers.'

'No, indeed,' said Felim, 'or not all three of them. Two I know, at all events. Look, Mr Will—there's

Sir Philip, praise be to God, he is the ould three and fourpence again—as well as ever—and Joan, the schoolmaster's *cailin deas*, with her spinning-wheel, if you plaise. Is it in her own cabin she is?'

'But the tall woman in black—tall against the sky,' exclaimed Will, a shiver going through him, 'who is she?'

'Your line is broke and the fish gone with the bait, on account of her,' said Felim, blazing up. 'What ails you, sir?'

'Can that be Lady Liscarroll?' said the youth, letting his rod fall into the water. The accident pulled up his thoughts violently; it was the business of the next five minutes to recover his costly fishing-tackle, floated on by the current. These manœuvres brought them nearer in, so that the Castle, rising above them, was more within sight. Hapgood made believe to go on with his trout-catching; but the dialogue which he kept up all along showed in what direction his fancy had taken wing.

'No person seen her in the open since she returned,' said Felim; 'she is under bonds, surely to God. But 'tis better than to make a bloody killing of her, as another son would do—the Hag of the Grey Eyes they call her, and a hag she is.'

'See if you can make her out with this glass,' answered Will, handing him a telescope, 'my sight is cloudy this morning.'

Felim adjusted the instrument, while his master

seemed busy about the tackle. 'Tis a powerful glass,' said the fisherman; 'I couldn't see plainer was I by the side of them in the sky above. There's Joan, sated like a queen, her spinning-wheel in front of her, and the white fingers drawing the thread, as 'twere playing on the harp.'

'But the other woman—the lady?' said Will, not daring to lift his eyes, speaking in an oddly muffled tone.

'Wait a while now till I see her full in the face. She is moving quick backwards and forwards, like the shuttle you'd be throwing. Ah, stand still, if 'tis yourself, my lady! She is eyeing our boat, I'll engage. Widow's weeds and yellow hair, and a shape as straight as a dart.'

'It must be,' said Will to himself, all manner of confused but rich emotions taking possession of him—he could never have said which was uppermost, but the result appeared to be fascination.

'Would you look through the spy-glass yourself, sir?' Felim went on. 'But what has taken your eyes from you? There's the second salmon we lost this day!'

Will threw him the rod. 'Hook him, then,' he cried, 'and give me the telescope.'

He felt like facing cannon. His eyelids burned, his pulse bounded. Then La Belle Dame Sans Merci swam into his horizon, fair and sad, her long draperies floating, her motions graceful but decided. A mist mmed the apparition; Will pitched his spy-glass

into the bottom of the boat, and strained his eyes in a long examination of the figures moving to and fro on the Castle roof.

'They are out tasting the blessed air and sun,' remarked O'Riordan; 'but we are better off, as it is. They'll catch no salmon from the tower. I have him, sir—I have him—lind a hand now to the sculls while I play the monster. He weighs sixteen pounds if he's an ounce.'

For twenty minutes they were hard at it, and the excitement, hot in master and man, gave Will's imagination a kindling which marked the fatal hour. His blood, not chill at any time, caught heat from the chase, the sense of spring, the acted story above on that embattled height. Love was leaping to the centaur's back—and would ride him headlong—an insane lad's love for his own fancy. These unread, inarticulate natures take the infection of romance without suspecting it; they are such children as never look behind the show or dream of rags and tinsel making its splendour. One spark was wanting, and Will's heart would be in the flames. It flew down upon him when their prey was landed and they resting on their oars.

Joan at the spinning-wheel had begun to sing one of her Irish songs, clear and sweet, which the breeze blew to them in snatches—little golden drops, or gleams of sunshine, falling upon their senses, making them drunk with melody.

'Hark now,' said Felim, 'did any man hear music in his sleep like that?' They listened in a great stillness. 'She is singing, "O youth of the ringlets, my false love!" 'Twould melt the heart in your bosom with compassion,' he whispered.

His master signed to him to keep quiet. Will did not know much of the words, but the air was familiar, plaintive and enticing in its forlorn simplicity.

Joan sang, 'Oh, I used to think, my storeen, you were the sun and moon; and after that I used to think you were the snow on the hill, or the bright light of God, and the star of knowledge, going before and behind me.'

She sang of the youth's broken promises with a trill of sorrowful laughter which died into tears. 'Satins and silks you promised me, head-dress and high-heeled shoes; and to follow after me, though you should swim the ocean. Not like that am I now—I am a bush in the gap of a wall—every noon and morning I do be seeing but this house of my father—and I alone.'

With a pathos, with a passion, with the wild heart of her people, Joan sang. The last words, 'and I alone,' which do not occur in this touching lament, she added, as from a store of grief known to herself; and only those who have heard in youth the Celtic spoken by their beloved will be capable of feeling what a sweet sadness lurks in this refrain, *am aonar!*

Alone, alone—was she hinting at a love unreturned, or showing its bright beam on her youthful wings? But Will Hapgood had no eyes except for the proud lady that stood listening, and to her strange history he fitted the music. In the free air a captive; by her son's side, yet divided; if, as the tale ran—whether false or true—she ever had a lover, he was dead and gone. Alone, alone she seemed, that should be Queen of the World.

How could he reach her? By what ladder of magic mount to her? Unless strong desire could cleave the air, she was separated from him as by a thousand leagues of fire. Philip, standing apart, in some tired mood of convalescence, rigid as the statue of the Commander, would wake and strike were that prison door attempted, of which he held the keys. No one had broken through his reserve, least of all Will, who knew neither stratagem nor sleight of hand, but rode across country, taking bush and bog, stream and stone wall, as they came in his way. But the impossible adventure drew him. While Joan sang, the statue of the Commander stood fixed in silence; the lady gazed abroad from the battlements, like Sister Anne, seeking deliverance.

Among the fishing-boats out on the waters, Lady Liscarroll had observed one which, when it had drawn in near the Castle, remained motionless, the two figures in it held by Joan's clear singing. She leaned over the edge in an idle humour, and so leaning

dropped a lace handkerchief from her hand into the waves underneath. It floated like some live thing blown by the wind towards Will Hapgood's boat, a white messenger, a question or a signal, such as the shipwrecked send forth on chance. One moment he saw it, the next he was in the water. Felim screamed; was the young master mad? Perhaps; but he had clutched the token, drawn a long breath, and swum, happy as a seal in sunshine, to the strand at no great distance.

'Pull in and take me off,' he shouted merrily to O'Riordan; 'I have had a ducking.'

'And you came near drowning,' said Felim.

''Tis equal to me,' answered Will in Irish. 'Now row home.'

CHAPTER X

THE FORBIDDEN DOOR

WHEN a man is mad there is no reasoning with him, but he has often a way of reasoning with himself—an insane logic, yet straight from the premises. Cathal, after this story had run its course, used to say of Will Hapgood that he resembled Fergus of the children of Leidhe, who was so smitten and spellbound by the breath of the monstrous woman in Lough Rury that he grew squint-eyed and crook-backed, 'his mouth twisted round to his poll,' and he, under that glamour, was not aware of it. But while the shapes of things were false about him, Will understood from the first what he intended to do. 'Liscarroll shall have fair warning,' he muttered, 'once, not twice. Then he may lay the blame where he likes.'

A singular chance, of which he heard from Nora O'Sullivan, struck him as furnishing the happy prologue to his entrance on the stage. What was it? All in good time, reader. Several days passed after the fishing expedition, and Will went up to Renmore, resolute, but outwardly unconcerned, the white token in his pocket. Sir Philip was cleaning

a gun in the hall when he arrived. To cut a long story short, young Hapgood brought out the handkerchief, much as he would have taken a fence, with teeth set and a catch in his breath, and explained on what errand he was there. 'I found this a few days back down by the strand,' said he. 'It has the Liscarroll crest. In fact, I—would it be Lady Liscarroll's?'

'I will give it to her,' said Philip, stuffing it into his belt rather curtly. 'Thanks.'

'Please say I found it,' continued Will, 'and—and—my mother would be happy to call on yours now she is at home. She sends her compliments.'

'Thanks again,' said the Baronet, with freezing politeness, 'it is quite unnecessary. My mother does not see visitors.'

'No? My mother will be so sorry. She was told that Miss O'Connor had paid a long visit last week to Lady Liscarroll. So she thought—'

'Who, in the devil's name—?' broke in Phil, his colour mounting, but he pulled up short, Will regarding him closely. 'Tush, it is all old women's chatter. My dear fellow, let us drop the subject.'

'Then Miss O'Connor did get across the five-barred gate,' insisted Will.

'What do you mean?' said the other, rubbing away at his fowling-piece.

'To offer you a fool's advice,' said Will, clapping him on the shoulder.

'Consider it offered, and let us talk of something else.'

'Now, Phil, just take an observation of me; did I come here to quarrel with you?' said Hapgood, seating himself where the light fell on his big fair face.

'It looks damned like it,' answered the Baronet, grounding his weapon with a clatter.

'Looks, but isn't. Phil, my lad, hadn't you better thank me for talking straight, when the whole country talks behind your back? I say Miss Lisaveta has given you the very chance you wanted, but could never have made. That's all right. In your place I would have done the same. But the consign is forced. Let your prisoner out.'

The man in front of him held that fowling-piece dangerously high. Would it come smashing down on Will Hapgood the next minute? He had spoken rudely and crudely, with intention. There was a frightful dizziness in Phil's mind, hovering like a hawk on the strike, but uncertain, when once more he let the gun drop and answered, keeping down his temper, 'We will say you mean well—you speak as a friend. I can't take advice in this matter, that's all.'

'But you can—don't be offended, Phil—you must. There's the law, and county opinion, and—suppose Lady Liscarroll were to die up in your old donjon? It would be murder.'

'It would be freedom,' said the unhappy young man, in broken accents. 'I tell you, Hapgood, since you force me to talk, one of us will have to die, my mother or myself.'

'No, no, that is your delusion. Quite absurd, my dear lad. Give her liberty and wash your hands of the affair. Who will blame you?'

The Baronet threw a foreboding glance at him. 'She will betray more men,' he said gloomily. 'Edmund has no hand in what I am doing, but he agrees with me. She is a woman not to be trusted out of my sight.'

'You will kill yourself and do her no good,' answered Will, standing up. 'I came to warn you; honestly—above board. You are not to be warned? But don't forget I warned you.'

It was uttered with equal heat and insolence which, had Philip not been wrapped up in his own griefs, ought to have given him the alert. He noticed merely that Will spoke as the fire-eater he would like to be, and let it go by. Hapgood was a bit of a bully; it did not signify—what did, when the world was out of joint?

'Well, I have restored the handkerchief, and we're always friends, eh, old boy?' said Will, as the Baronet would not answer.

'Always friends,' replied Phil, not looking up, but holding out his hand by way of farewell. On these terms they parted. 'He's more of a fool than

I guessed,' thought each of the other, reflecting on their interview.

Had Liscarroll known everything, he would have called Hapgood a liar into the bargain. The austere mistress of Derryvore had sent no compliments, proposed no calling on the grey-eyed witch, her abhorrence from of old. It was Will who aimed this random shaft, reckoning he could follow it up with a second, and persuade his mother that Lady Liscarroll was waiting for her on what O'Dwyer termed 'The Mount of Subsequent Repentance.'

To unload her stock of tracts Mrs Hapgood would have gone anywhere, upwards or downwards. She had pressed those tracts on the wizard himself so vehemently that, between his wrath and his sense of what was due to the weaker vessel, he could only rout her with a Greek quotation, 'Far from shame dwells that cruel goddess.' But in his native tongue he growled, 'If I had you and your tracts, madam, in my right hand, 'tisn't long till I'd make shivers and shives of what I was carrying.' Still, as he said among friends, there was 'an element of facetiousness' in Mrs Hapgood's Tongataboo missionary ways, which puckered his features into a grin, and her irreverent son was now quick to make his profit of that wasted zeal. Could she also abandon Miss O'Connor to the wiles of the enemy? Another brand to snatch from the burning, after that

prolonged visit! He would let fly his second arrow.

Lisaveta, with the peculiar obstinacy of the gentle Slav temper, which is that of the fanatic or the saint, had not yielded an inch to Edmund's arguments. 'She feared no evil, for she knew no sin.' An intense pity overcame her when she pictured the lonesome Castle, the mother like some forlorn house-haunting spirit, the young man half dead with sorrow and watching. Why should she not strike in to help them? Mrs Hapgood's mailed virtue she would have laughed out of countenance; yet Lisaveta seemed fresh and fragrant as the red rose, of which her Puritan acquaintance gloried in displaying only the sharpest spines. It had fallen out, accordingly—since our wishes make our opportunities—that Miss O'Connor, driving by Renmore on an afternoon, had got inside the charmed circle without anyone's consent.

When she had stopped at the Castle gate to inquire about Philip's health, the steward, thinking his master at home, went searching after him. Lisaveta, who had come into the hall, was lingering there in admiration, as often before, of its old oak roof, its trophies of stags' horns, and its romantic chiaroscuro, when a girl came out above on the Florentine staircase—a girl she had not seen for months. She ran up instantly and took Joan in her arms. The heavy door leading to the tower was open, and there stood the timid

warder, shy and affectionate, with its key in her hand. 'Now or never,' thought Lisaveta. That old fairy-tale came into her mind of a forbidden room in a lofty turret, a witch at the spinning-wheel, a naughty maiden running up the stairs in quest of adventure. 'For God's sake, don't,' cried Joan, putting the key in the door. It was too late. The wilful Rosebloom had sprung up two steps at a time.

Her young friend flew after, arriving just as Lisaveta had seen the door of the High Room flung wide and a dark figure standing on the threshold. ''Tis Miss O'Connor from Airgead Ross,' exclaimed Joan, doing the honours out of breath. Lady Liscarroll laughed and caught her visitor by the hand.

'Welcome and welcome again,' she cried, leading her in. 'You come too, my dear child,' as her attendant was hesitating, 'we shall talk no secrets; indeed, I have been solitary so long I may want an interpreter.'

All this was said lightly and airily, persuasive as a lark's trill, yet with the manner of the great world. Miss O'Connor smiled when she saw the spinning-wheel. 'Not mine,' said Lady Liscarroll. 'It is Joan that spins and sings. I do nothing but mope or listen. So you are Charlie O'Connor's daughter. Tell me about him—about yourself. Take that chair and talk.'

But she talked—the beautiful witch—that Lisaveta might be feeling more at home. They sat by the window, and the dove-like murmurs of the sea filled

up the pauses in a conversation so suddenly improvised. On both sides it was a *reconnaissance* in force. The Russian girl had expected beauty worn by grief; she saw the splendid youth which women artists know how to preserve into middle years. A charm of style, expression, sentiment, which amazed her—quite irresistible. And all the graces that come with knowledge of life, with travel, with a certain air of distinction not often English, with dainty French phrases caught on the wing. Lisaveta was the very girl to be spell-bound. She had spent her season in Rome and Florence; she knew the Rhine with its castles and its vine-clad hills; like all high Russians, her mother had been everywhere, and O'Connor himself was one of the Irish gentlemen who have a touch of the Parisian, something to the manner born which puts them at ease in all societies. Gaiety is infectious; these two women were soon playing their lively duo, as the sky lights up when night meets the morning.

They talked of everything but Lady Liscarroll's tragedy. That lay buried beneath twenty Atlantics; the waves rippled over it, the breezes sang. One insinuation crept round Miss O'Connor's heart, a snake drawn thither by such enchanting music—what a pity that this bright creature should be cut off from her kind, so abounding in liveliness and joy! Did she talk to Philip as she was talking now? Then a glance at the spinning-wheel and silent Joan would bring back the admonitory legend of the witch in the tower.

But so novel an admixture of sensations tended to throw a young soul off its balance; she had heard, but never seen with her eyes, how fascinating a woman might be whose goodness was problematical. The child that looked forth in Lisaveta's pale and serious countenance took fright, but would not run away. An hour vanished to nothing; still they kept up the game of hide-and-seek, both amused, feeling it to be an adventure with unknown issues. The Mary Stuart of Renmore had never been so brilliant in her palmiest days. She was playing for her life.

'Sorry, but I must go now,' said her visitor, rising, 'and—may I ask it?—do come and see me at Silverwood. Come and stay?'

The captive sighed pensively. 'Shall we be allowed to fly that far, Joan? What do you think? You look downcast.'

'I would wait awhile,' answered Joan, 'till the weather was settled.'

Her pleasure in the dialogue which she did not share was anything but intense. She had her own thoughts about Lady Liscarroll, and interpreted better than their visitor what all these fireworks meant. 'I see danger, I see destruction,' she would have exclaimed, had she spoken out. The red mist was rolling up again.

'Perhaps you are right,' answered the lady, patting her cheek. 'In the fair golden weather we will come, my dear young friend. But don't desert us. I am

always at home. Your father and I rode many a time after the same pack of hounds—the dear old Black and Tans; we have danced to the same tunes in many a ballroom. Stay—take this miniature; it is said to be like me. I think it has something of Philip in the expression. Do you?'

'It has the eyes—not the mouth,' said Lisaveta, chilled at the name, which reminded her that she was risking his anger and Edmund's. She put the keepsake away, shook hands, all her timidity now revenging itself on her rashness, and fled downstairs as hastily as she had sprung up them.

In the hall, not Philip, but his cousin was waiting. The girl had fancied that she could brave the Baronet; one sight of Edmund swept the other from her recollection, and oh, this meeting was far worse! It shook her as the sudden breeze sets the aspen quivering. He would rebuke her as if she had broken a pledge, and she felt defenceless. Some new heaven, undreamt of till then, flashed with all its vistas upon her, and was gone in a moment.

Edmund drew down his heavy brows. Tenderness, fear and rage, struggled within him. 'Why couldn't you believe me?' he cried abruptly. 'Why will you make things hard for us?'

'But she was so lonely,' pleaded Lisaveta, 'and—I never saw her equal—the most charming of women! I confess it was wrong. The door stood open; blame no one but me. Won't you forgive my curiosity?'

'Charming, charming!' he echoed. 'Woe betide such charms! Yes, I could forgive your curiosity; but have I—have I thought and dreamt about you month after month to read you no better? It is not curiosity—it is the dreadful passion for self-sacrifice that stirs in you and will ruin you.'

A sort of agony choked him; the table against which he was leaning shook.

'You scourge me with compliments,' said Lisaveta, endeavouring to smile.

'Compliments? It is the truth—your truth. The Russian in you is what I dread. Remember how much you have told me of your mother, your very peasants—the mad love of suffering which has planted itself deep in the Russian heart. Lady Liscarroll has sinned; you want to take her sin upon you, to be a scape-goat, a sin-offering. I know you, Miss O'Connor.'

The insight of this young man seemed to her prodigious; it revealed Lisaveta to herself as though a lamp had been lit in her brain and shed its rays over the innermost deeps of the spirit. 'You scold me like a saint,' she said in defence. 'That is what you would do yourself. *I* was only asking your aunt to Silverwood.'

'And what is she to you?' he cried, striking the table hard; 'life is before you—to enjoy, not to throw away on the first beggar you meet. Let her suffer. She deserves it.'

Lisaveta smiled at his passion. 'I never could see

a dog suffer, let alone a woman, my own flesh and blood. Don't ask it now.'

'I tell you she is a creature all flame and poison,' he said despairingly. 'O'Dwyer, who has seen her from first to last—do you know what he calls her?'

'He weighs all of us in loaded scales,' said Miss O'Connor.'

'He calls her the woman whose heart was a serpent's head.'

The girl laughed merrily. 'Original, as always. But why the head in the heart?'

'Because she has poisoned every good feeling a woman ought to cherish. Look, my dear child, you are taken with her acting, which I admit is wonderful. But how did she behave to her son? He was fourteen when she disappeared. How to Sir Walter? In two years he lay in his grave, by that blow from his wife's hand. I say nothing of myself—'

'But do, please. Tell me your story.' They were seated now near the hearth, and had forgotten to keep their distance—really forgotten.

'In three words then. My mother died when I was born. Captain Richard Liscarroll, my father, was sent to India, caught jungle-fever, and, I hope, joined my mother in Heaven. Sir Walter adopted me.'

'And Lady Liscarroll?—'

'Hated me,' concluded Edmund. 'Hates me now. Thinks it is I that stiffen Phil's back. Little she knows him!'

'I can't fancy anyone hating you,' said she, with a roguish, pensive smile, 'but you are very teasing sometimes, and as stern a schoolmaster as old Cathal. I daresay you teased your aunt.'

'My uncle could dispose of his property as he liked; he put me in his will after Philip and treated me as his younger son. That was all my teasing.'

'Well, bygones are bygones,' said Lisaveta; 'I can't think of that proud creature up there—alive and yet dead—but my heart bleeds. Yes, I want to save her.'

Edmund grew desperate. 'There is only the one way to save her and not destroy yourself,' he exclaimed, leaping to his feet.

'Which is that?' she asked, rising, not in the least aware of what he was going to say.

'Marry Sir Philip,' he cried, turning deadly white.

'You advise me to marry your cousin?' she said in a strangled tone, as she moved towards the door. 'You, Edmund?'

He remarked the Christian name, but took no advantage of it. To his thought, the danger was always that creature of flame and poison whom Lisaveta would not shun—that rattlesnake. 'I advise nothing,' he said hoarsely, 'except that you will fight against your Russian madness. Let the woman alone, or marry Sir Philip.' He meant it to be impossible.

'I will think of it,' she said coldly, and drove off.

CHAPTER XI

CHILDREN OF LIR

BUT Philip had other shafts in his heart, nor was he meditating of love. His fearful sickness, wasting him to a shadow, seemed to fill with dreams and to trouble a brain that its owner would have called dull, for with his brilliant cousin at his side, how could he imagine himself not so? 'I am a *leath omadan*—half a fool,' he would laugh bitterly, wounding his pride with the lively Irish phrase.

He was now such as the children of Lir had been when night and black frost overtook them on the pinnacle of the Rock of Seals, and, 'each was chilled in his place as they lay upon the rock, so that their feet, their feathers, and their wings clave to it, and when they strove to get loose they left there the skin of their feet, and the feathers of their breasts, and the tips of their wings.'

Long, long he had drifted solitary upon the current of this great grief. With the dumb instinct of his dogs or horses, the boy had set his love on father and mother—not quick to seize the meaning of those fiery streaks that once in a while darted through the

sky of home—perplexed but not foreboding. On a sudden the mother was gone; the dark unknown had swallowed up that fair apparition, and Philip, running to the edge of the abyss, cried down it in vain, 'Mother, mother!'

His heart broke within him; but he could not tell anyone, no, not his dear father, who rambled aimlessly, day and night, by the sea, or disappeared on strange expeditions, to come back with a sallow face and eyes out of which the sparkle had vanished.

Their souls met in a speechless kiss; but their lips were silent. Shame held their heads bowed to earth; love tore open the wound in their breast and poisoned it. From those dark hours Philip had never issued free; his father died of them. And Lady Liscarroll was dancing her dance on a carpet of flowers, sure, with the incredible lightness that intoxication brings, of her sanguine creed. 'The boy won't miss me, and Sir Walter is tender-hearted when he chooses. Let him look after his son.'

There is an old story of the youth whose features were fair as a girl's, but who from neck to ankles was covered with leprosy, which he hid under silken raiment and fine linen. Yet, one day, the point of a sword rent his sleeve, and he appeared what he had always been—a leper. We shall not understand Philip Liscarroll unless we take this picture in; for he lived it—from the age of fourteen he bore the taint, visible to himself, though others did not remark

it, or let him pass without hearing what they said. Always shy, embarrassed of his person, as the French saying goes, he never went into society but he thought all eyes were fixed on his great shock of red hair, his freckled face and his long legs. No vanity looked out from his shaving glass; when Cathal's ruddy epithet of 'the Firbolg' got round to him, Philip snorted between disdain and hurt as at a sudden stab. 'No doubt I'm an ugly devil,' was his inward speech. He did not know that a painter would have chosen this ugly devil to light up his backgrounds, or how some of the prettiest of those Celtic maidens smiled as he came striding by in the dream which flung about his steps a kind of sadness and mystery. The poison of his mother's brewing had blinded this young giant's eyes. With what face could he ask a girl to marry him, branded like the son of a man that had been hanged? Silence gathering over Lady Liscarroll's name, burying her alive, shut him in one tomb with her. So he must live, so die; Edmund should have the estate; the elder branch of Renmore lay withered.

To the age of four-and-twenty these sad thoughts had been his escort. At last, the appearance he once adored rose up from the unknown—as beautiful as ever, but ghastly with hues of sin and murder, a shining death-light.

Philip did not use an imaged style; the deep thing within, which was himself, carried on its broodings

with slight broken metaphors and spoke in short-hand. We translate him, but not untruly. One sulphurous flash, a sword and a mirror, had brought back his mother's countenance, smiting him to the sick-bed where he moaned or tossed an interminable time, until that tawny mist came down, and with it, as he fancied, the end. But some power scattered it; lights broke on him from this side and that; again he looked up, and what he saw was a girl's face turned towards his, tender grey eyes over lips parted in expectation and wonder. A second vision had burnt itself into the brain, fresh and sweet as an April morning.

With Joan came the fairy music too, low and almost inarticulate, rippling, tinkling, as streams and winds flow for their own pleasure, but full of enchantments. It was mixed with the hum of the spinning-wheel, and seemed to laugh over it divinely—to laugh as the finest sorrow laughs, as the rain holds the sun in its falling drops, and the land brightens where they strike. April—this was April—Edmund would have made poetry of it all, and Joan should be the April-maiden in his rhymes; but Philip, whose verses must be feelings and acts prompted by them, went blindly into the flowering, rain-dashed, song-lit spring, not knowing whither, except that the music drew and he followed. Why, it was love already, you will say. Hush, my too-wise reader, let the spell work, be not impatient for the untwisting of these

secret harmonies. Philip was a novice in the art, and Joan as little aware of her influence as a wave that dances on the sea of its foam-born beauty. They dreamt they knew not what. How should they know?

Had Cathal's eyes looked as sharply into his own matters as they did into the adventures of 'the great Trojans of Troy,' he might have taken fright and recalled Joan to his cabin, though Davy Roche had now begun to threaten him with legal processes, actions for ejectment and recovery, and the other *peines fortes et dures* known to tenants in Ireland. 'There's many a twist in the Sassenach law,' was a favourite among proverbs with O'Dwyer. The rope was getting ready to put round his horns and bring him down. Young ears that hear the grass growing had not been asleep when he let loose at the Cork butterman, in open school, that terrific anathema. The boys, at first thunderstruck, caught up, with infinite relish, so handy a weapon, and in more than one quarrel 'the curse of Davy Roche' supplemented for a month or six weeks the curse of Cromwell, hitherto revered as beyond parallel efficacious. 'May the divil sweep out hell with you, and thin burn the broom' was so often echoed in Renmore village on market-days that Father Falvey had at last to prohibit from the altar this too-picturesque imprecation, adding his belief that curses like chickens came home to roost. Henceforth, the village saw Davy Roche's curse

sitting up inside the thatch of the schoolmaster's cottage.

O'Dwyer smiled proudly, but some dread far within gave him a twinge. 'What call had Father Falvey to say that, when I was doing no harm to his Reverence?' he muttered to Garret O'Riordan; 'and being the village schoolmaster besides.'

'Himself could tell you best,' answered Garret, looking away as in thought, 'but there's a thing we all know—let the priest o' God say good or bad, 'twill surely be so. Did Patsy Doyle's mother live long after giving back words to Father Hennessy, and he threatening to read his book over her? You saw how she wasted and dwined after that; even his blessing couldn't rise her from the flat of her back. I hope it won't be the same with you, O'Dwyer; but indeed 'tis the divil's own tongue is in your mouth by times.'

'I don't deny the priest has power,' answered Cathal, 'the more by token that whin St Patrick bate down the Druids, he took it from them and gave it over to the clergy. However, they shouldn't be putting it to the back of a man like Davy Roche. I'd sooner have Beelzebub himself for a landlord—the cross of Christ between us and all harm. But don't say I said it, Garret.'

No, her father could only wish that Joan should stay up at the house and earn the white shillings. He was there in his erratic fashion, off and on, but never

allowed in to the tower, and, like the rest of the country-folk, had begun to think of Lady Liscarroll as an invisible witch, or Banshee, not safe to meddle with. 'Well, well,' he said to his daughter in their moments of talk, '*shinn fein*, *shinn fein*—ourselves before all. You tell me this great woman is your friend. Does her son come near her now?'

'I'm not sure 'tis right to be talking of them,' answered Joan; 'the master is a strange man, however. Sometimes I'd fancy 'twas the bits of songs I learned from you that brings him listening on the stairs, or creeping like a ghost into the High Room itself. If I wasn't spinning always—'tis that makes me sing—I'd feel ashamed. But what harm would he do—the poor boy? For he is but a boy to Mr Edmund.'

'True for you, Joan; and yet Mr Edmund is the junior of them. But he sits there and doesn't open his mouth? What does Lady Eleanor say to that?'

'She says as little till he spakes to her; then she is the honey-mouth and the laughing eye. Anyone but Sir Philip would think the day short to be with Lady Liscarroll. Though, indeed, I do be tired and lonesome, father, in those big ould rooms. Is it true,' lowering her voice, 'that her husband does be showing himself in the Castle?' She made the sign of the cross as the words left her lips.

'Why do you question me?' asked O'Dwyer, his curiosity aroused.

'Maybe 'tis foolishness,' answered Joan; 'still,

when I'm awake at nights, or between sleeping and waking, I hear whispers and cries, and lamentations, and something that stirs in the thick of the walls, God forgive me.'

'You hear the great sound of the sea, and the rise of ivy dashed by winds or tempests against the stones they cling to; and the darkness itself has voices you couldn't know in the daytime. The night outside is a ghost; don't be frightened till it walks into the room to you, child of my heart.'

'I'd sooner be at home,' she said with a shiver, 'was it not for the rent tormenting us. Here's a few shillings now, father; will you keep them safe till I come?'

'I will, I will,' he said vaguely, making on the spot a resolution which he knew would snap like threads in the fire. 'I'll not be wasteful or extravagant. There's my hand and word on it.'

'We're trusting to them for that man,' she insisted with a trembling affection. 'What will you do without them, father?'

'My word is as good as my bond,' he answered, making a great show of courage. It was—and no better.

Happen what might, therefore, Cathal looked away while the wheels drove. In his glorified moments, the punch bowl creating smoky golden spectres that jigged unsteadily in the steaming haze, he might have thought of Joan as the swan-maiden, Fionnghuala—

the white-shouldered—who sang to her brothers when they crept round her, half-dead with the sea-frosts. His own heart swelled and bounded as her voice trilled its low notes—what wonder if others felt their grief lessened at the plaintive music of that swan, or slept sound and easy after it? By their native law, no hurt could be done to birds that sang such sweet melodies; and so Cathal went his way merrily enough and found his cronies in the old chimney corner, where, as long as he could pay, there was 'a never-failing supply of roast pig and good liquor.' So he soon had made an end—in order to spite Davy Roche—of his daughter's white shillings.

Philip did say in his heart a thousand times that to live was to be miserable. The wings of the spirit were frostbound; all day long storms beat and whistled about his solitude, and the swan-maiden's lay would have served him well; how much he had to suffer—'the cold of that night, the depth of that snow, the hardness of that wind!' His heavy head and drenched feathers betokened the drooping of a courage wild to rashness when he could grapple with an enemy, but here in conflict with the impalpable—for one of them must die, as he said to Will Hapgood—the way out was suicide or murder. These ever-whirling arguments tore him on their wheel. Then he would creep, as Joan called it—the word was apt—along the tower staircase and listen outside, standing at a loophole from which the sea was visible,

while this mermaid sang. It opened his heart a little.

No more did Philip dream of what we call love, in these early hours, than does a child that hearkens to the nightingale. His wings had yet to be loosened from the rock, else for him there would be no flying over the bright waves, in spring, with his mate. Like a child he wove insensibly into the snatches of old Irish song all that he saw, hoped, feared, longed after. The strange mystery of ocean round his Castle walls made the deeps and the horizons of that music; the billows rolled over it; the foam flew with it; the lights innumerable and all their splendours coloured it; the secret or sudden voices of the visionary birds came as a chorus to swell and heighten it; an immense yearning for peace, for comfort, took hold of the simple chant, which was pure as a throstle's note, and interpreted its message on a scale known to the heart that has loved but now finds itself alone. I do not say that another, different from Philip, less feeling and less tortured, would have taken this music for a cup into which he might pour an infinite sweetness. All I say is that he did so, in his wild tower of the winds, fixing his tired eyes upon the pale blue waters which, as the breeze smote them, broke into gleams of sunshine. The salt of life was in them and in the swan-maiden's thrilling tones. But she, too, could understand, as he came softly up day after day, what it was that brought him. 'Tis a long time to be in

pain,' she remarked to his mother, seeing how downcast he went to and fro.

'Yes, my dear, I have gone through a good deal,' answered the lady, with a quick glance towards her son; 'but I can throw it off—otherwise, I should have been in my grave years ago. Philip took all his baby-complaints hard. He has not corrected that fault.'

A flush, light as the sparkle of dew, came and went over Joan's features. This mother of Philip's had turned for the instant to a venomous hag. She said nothing, however. Though untrained in the ways of the great world, her mind had long been made up that to take the young man's side would be severe upon Lady Liscarroll and no help to him. 'Bad was the beginning,' she thought, 'and worse is to come. I won't draw it down with foolish talk.'

In this forlorn existence what talk could there be? Philip, leaving the concerns of his place and property to his agent—a hard man of business, Mr Colegrave from the County Wicklow—turning over to Edmund the few visitors that were bold enough to appear at Castle Dangerous, either passed the hours in his room or went up to these silent sessions, bitter and sad, as if he dreaded to leave his mother out of sight. He pitied, hated, even loved her—all in the same despairing way; could he have known her thoughts, it seemed to him that their lives must change for the better; but no, behind her smooth and delicate speeches someone lay hid whom he should never

see. The woman's art baffled him, that instantaneous acting which is second nature, too subtle and too finished for a rude, direct temper like his own. When he considered how she had none to speak with but this untaught child, how she must count the hours as they fell wearily into the sandglass—no future, no hope—he was tempted to fling the doors wide and risk the consequences. Then he would go up, death in his looks, and sit there in the High Room, or on the roof of the tower, face to face with this guilty, this pitiable mother; and their hands would be locked, and no word said, but only the voices of the air would come whispering round them, until the lady called for those ballads and the girl's accents answered.

Thus all three were falling into a profound disquietude, to which perhaps Lady Liscarroll, as a woman of the world, was more refractory than these children of nature. Shadows over them, abysses beneath them; the gate of everyday, 'with dreadful faces thronged and fiery arms'; why should they pass down to it, pass through it? Oh, could that enemy of a universe be annihilated for them—then Philip would not grudge to live here, in prison or on the tower, till death struck them all. He forgot how men and women looked, what they did or said, away from his sentry-guard; it was nothing to him now. More and more he plunged into the still life around, which neither accused, nor could be drawn to evil, but spread before him, above and below—an im-

measurable air sown with stars, a mighty water full of strange, not human, things—'the lovely wet plain,' as our Irish poet says—beautiful in its unconcern for what vexed these mortals—sucking in the light and spouting it again in sheets of sunny foam. Thus he felt, and by some magic the girl at his side comprehended. Her eyes, limpid and grave, told him as much. Yet, if they reflected, they did not reveal, the glances that in this mute ecstasy he flung her way. Had his wings begun to sprout?

But now Lisaveta, the Russian saint, as people called her, had come and torn aside the pale roses into which the young man's blood was secretly distilling, drop by drop; his castle in the air shook to its base, the crystal of his dream shivered ominously. Will Hapgood's tall form rose on the drawbridge, challenging admission. Who had done this thing? As soon as Will had taken himself off, Philip flung down his fowling-piece so violently on the floor that he broke one of the tiles across—a memento of his rage and perplexity which he was to tramp over often. With masterful strides he sprang upstairs, undid the tower door, and ran, like the madman he felt, in search of Joan, whom he found by the loophole window, telling her beads. The girl, at his appearance with flushed cheeks and eyes ablaze, knew that a storm was bearing straight upon the house. She trembled—her nerves were finely-strung—but plucked up a brave heart against its advance. When

their eyes met in a long and dubious encounter—not a syllable breaking the charm — they were both suddenly aware that they had never looked at each other in so lone a world, with such direct glances, till that moment. Joan's eyes fell first; and eager to check some strong emotion which was wholly new to her, she said, colouring like the tender sky of the dawn, 'Is it my lady you would be wanting? I'll go tell her.'

Philip stretched out his hand to keep her motionless. 'Not yet, not yet,' was all he could get out; he did not dare to overstep the short space between them. 'What have I done?' muttered an unknown, a pleading, passionate voice in Joan's ears, 'that you should bring this upon me?'

'This, Sir Philip,' she answered; 'this what? Ah, Miss O'Connor!'

'Yes, and this,' he said hoarsely, signing that she should come to a window opposite him. 'Look here.'

She saw Will Hapgood riding along the avenue, his errand accomplished.

'To-day, Hapgood. To-morrow, the county will be here. Disgrace on disgrace, and I shall die as my father did, like a badger in a hole. Your doing, Joan!'

Again the questioning eyes met in a strange compassion, wrath, tenderness—a thousand feelings fused into one, and that supreme. The next instant they had taken each other's hands, to drop them as suddenly, in an atmosphere which was all flame.

'Never mind; you couldn't help it,' said Philip, when he saw her eyes wet. 'But, anyhow, you are sorry for me. Any person would be,' he ended almost in a boyish tone, complaining and asking comfort. Joan's tears fell on her beads as she held them before her.

'Oh, Sir Philip, I had a mother as well as you,' she said, her bosom heaving. 'We don't know where she is; and I'd give the world to hear tell of her. Is it a girl like me that wouldn't feel for you?'

'I remember,' he said, with a deep sigh; 'forgive me; trouble makes a man selfish. Do you always feel the pain—the—the shame of it—as I do?'

'God knows, 'tis never far from me,' she answered; 'rising up and lying down I used to be sorrowful, with the red spot on my forehead, that I thought Renmore was looking at. Whin I'd hear the people talking, I could go under the ground or into the lonesomest water that ever the sea covered. 'Twas that very thing brought me hither. Surely, my heart was broke at the sight of Lady Eleanor; but I held to it, and I'm here this day.'

'Could you forgive your mother, Joan, if she came back?' he asked.

'I could,' she answered simply. 'But I wouldn't say my father could. The men are not like us.' Her meditative look was beautiful as she said this.

'Your father is living, mine is dead. It makes a difference,' said Philip. 'Besides, I can't see into her heart. Can you?'

Joan paused before she would touch so inflammable a tinder.

'She is proud, her breast is full up of grief, and her head is light with trouble. I don't believe she knows half the time what she is doing.'

'Nor what she has done,' he said despairingly. 'It is nothing in her eyes.'

''Tis the drunkenness of sin,' answered Joan, gravely, 'and that's a hard, but a true word. There's often a black head on a white body, but the head won't see itself.'

'And the fool of a world runs to see it,' said Philip. 'Why did you let Miss O'Connor in? Ah, why?'

'She ran past me,' said the girl, sobbing; 'would a lady be stopped by a poor thing like myself? But, indeed, Sir Philip,' she continued, 'Lady Liscarroll is too fine a bird to be kept in the cage. I'd advise—but who would be said by me?' She broke off in confusion.

'Let me hear your advice,' he answered eagerly; 'it will be honest—I can see to the bottom of *your* heart, Joan. Clear as a well, can't I?'

'You'd be the wise man,' she said, laughing under her breath. 'My advice, thin, is to let your mother go to Miss O'Connor's, as she is invited, where the air is fine, and everything of the best; and she's the lovable woman, Miss Lisaveta. She begged and prayed Lady Eleanor to go to her.'

'Would you go, too, Joan?' he said, after a long fit of musing on the proposal.

'If it was put upon me, I would, though my poor ould father is the worse that I'm not with him.'

'Whatever I do, harm is sure to come of it,' he concluded, the bitter drop infecting his tongue; 'when the hawk is a linnet, you may trust this kind of woman.'

'And that won't be till the starlings lose their bills,' said Joan; 'but a woman that's not good is worse left to herself. I'd put a keeper upon her, and it should be the finest in the barony, and that's Miss O'Connor.'

'Is it, indeed?' answered Philip, his eyes smiling. 'Is there none nearer than Airgead Ross?

It seemed to him he was in his beloved solitude again, hearing the voices of the sea.

CHAPTER XII

FREEDOM

Voices of the sea can be loud and turbulent about an old Munster castle which faces, or even breasts, the Atlantic ; and when the air at night-time, under a raging moon, sends out its volleying cries, the wild waters leaping to them, the clouds all tongues of fire and charges of tempest, Renmore seems to reel in a headlong dance, bewitched like the world around.

It was a fearful night. Nothing had come so far of Joan's counsel to her master ; and she sat in the dim obscurity with Lady Liscarroll, watching how the clouds flew, fire and thunder on their wings, chasing like eagles over a sky all in movement. The dinner-hour was past ; but no candles gave light in the room ; her lady would have it so. 'I don't know what ails me,' said Joan at last ; ''tisn't drowsy I am, but heavy as lead — falling, falling before me—and frightened ! The sky comes at me like a mouth roaring. God help anyone at sea this night.'

'Go to bed, my child,' said her mistress, 'go and

sleep in your little chamber in the wall; I shall not be far off. What makes you afraid?'

'The great lightnings and this thunder,' said Joan. 'Oh, Mother of God, who sent it? Hear to the screeching of the winds! But I'll be fast asleep this minute. Good-night, my lady—the power that is in fire, and in water, and in the blessed ground itself, be between us and all harm. Amen! My dear lady, for your husband's and your father's soul say Amen!'

Her fear was contagious, if not her piety, and the strong woman without imagination shuddered. 'I do say Amen, you silly child,' she replied, 'but what are those strange powers you call on?'

'The power that goes up in fire, and falls in water, and lies straight in the earth—there's the living and the dead in it,' answered the girl, 'but I'm asleep while I'm talking. Oh, good-night.'

With uncertain steps, as of a sleep-walker, she passed slowly from the room, which was Lady Liscarroll's bed-chamber, into her own. Joan's little cabin—it was hardly more—had been taken out of the thickness of the wall. Its old panellings were concealed by a worm-eaten tapestry, and it contained one small window, before which the insane moon appeared to be playing pranks, its rays darting across the barred panes fantastically, to be quenched in the awful clouds that pursued them, as wolves on the track of a herd of flying fawns.

The girl, like most Celtic natures, was keenly alive to the terror and the magnificence of storms in which the wheeled lightning flashed through heaven. But to-night her uneasiness grew, as in obedience to some warning voice within her; and, as she lay cowering, her face turned from the glare which nevertheless enveloped her from time to time, she fell into a sleep that shook and tossed her as on the boiling sea. How long the nightmare lasted she could never have told; its duration was not to be reckoned on our earthly timepieces; but the effect was to mingle outside and inside, light and dark, in a whirlwind, a tumult, that deafened reason and excited fear more heart-shaking than she had ever known. Sleep was taken by the throat, hurled out upon the ocean with its seething, hungry waves. A host of conflicting sounds came rushing about her ears, and she sat up awake, so terrified that she would have called to Lady Liscarroll had she dared. Shame at her cowardice would not let her; but the poor child rose and dressed herself, in frightful expectation of what must befall Renmore if the storm did not cease.

Then she lay down and waited, for her mind would not consent that the night should pass without misfortune. And on the enormous castle wall at which she kept staring, at length a ray glittered which came neither from moon nor storm; she heard the door creak, a ghost of a footfall draw near, and someone was at her bedside looking down upon her.

Not an unknown, or she must have screamed; but even with eyes turned away she felt it was the prisoner of the High Room. In kindness, no doubt, anxious that Joan should sleep during the fearful hurricane which had gathered strength, hour after hour, until the Castle began to throb as with a beating heart. The girl, her eyes closed, made no sign. Then she knew that Lady Liscarroll had moved away by the motion of the light she carried; but instead of returning to her chamber, she was, it would seem, examining the tapestry below Joan's bed, for it flapped backwards and forwards as if shaken.

Gazing round furtively, what the astonished girl beheld was a bare space on the wall, her mistress putting a small key into an invisible lock, and part of the tower yielding outwardly, as if into another room. The lady wore a long mantle, and she had just laid from her a shaded light. Before two seconds Joan was up, had seized her by the wrist, and was peering by turns into her frowning face and down a flight of stone steps which led to darkness. 'God's sake, my lady, where are you going on such a night?' she tried to say; but the words came in stifled whispers.

'Why didn't you stay asleep, Joan? It would have been better for you,' answered the lady, her brow still dark. 'I have got the key of the gate below. Where am I going? Into the storm. This place strangles me.'

'But you must not lave Sir Philip! — you're running from him—what will he say when he sees you're gone? On a night like this? He'll think you threw yourself into the water and I didn't hinder it. You must not go.'

'Who will keep me back? Mind, I never hinted I was leaving Renmore. But what if I chose to do it?'

'I'll follow you to the world's end,' answered Joan, striving to get in front of her on the dark stairs. 'I'll rise the place on you,' and that thought made her glance towards the door by which Lady Liscarroll had entered, but it was shut; moreover, she dreaded to move back, lest this opening should be barred against her. 'Take me with you, or go to your bed,' she repeated. 'Oh'—a fearful thought striking her—'is it to meet some man below you are fleeing out of the Castle?'

Her mistress laughed loud and scornfully. 'How wise these babes are! Yes, Joan, there is a man at the sea-gate; can't you hear him knocking? Come down with me, since you will have it so, and witness our *tête-à-tête* in the driving rain. You little fool,' she continued, her foot on the stairs, 'you shall take my son a message, if you think it worth while, but first let us get our meeting over.'

The fierce playfulness of the woman, under a tempest which flung lightnings about them, would have scared Joan, but something held her up,

though she thought herself dying. Down the crooked, broken stairs they huddled together, the light rushing fantastically with them and making the gloom terrible, until they arrived at a heavy door which was already swung open and admitted violent gusts from the sea. A figure stood on the threshold motionless.

When the lantern revealed him, Joan saw Will Hapgood. But Lady Liscarroll's face indicated neither fear nor astonishment. 'Ah, it is my unknown correspondent,' she muttered; 'even on a night like this he keeps his promise,' and speaking louder, 'but who are you then?'

So swiftly did the colour hunt across his face that by turns it shone crimson and dulled to an ashy paleness. Baring his head, he whispered violently, 'At last you have come. I wrote and wrote—hadn't you my letters?'

All his blood was tingling. The lady drew back upon the stairs as if a scorched wind beat upon her.

'You got my letters?' he insisted.

Joan tried to throw herself between them. 'For the love of Heaven,' she cried, the storm choking off her sentences, 'go back, my lady, shut the gate on him. Mr Hapgood, return the way you came. Are you an honest woman's son? Out of this, I tell you, though 'twas into the sea itself. Will I screech the house down?'

'Be quiet, Joan,' said Lady Liscarroll, 'quiet, girl!

I—so you are Mr Hapgood, and you wrote?' with an enigmatic expression turning to the young man. Some unconquerable passion in his eyes leaped through the air and staggered her, as if she had received a blow from his right arm, raised in entreaty and protestation.

'I am Will Hapgood, of Derryvore; you don't remember me. I have never forgotten you. I saw you on this tower, the day you let your handkerchief fall into the water. I got it out, sent it you by Philip, and letters by O'Sullivan. He never gave them? Oh, I am unlucky!'

The whirlwind could not drown that cry. But the fair woman, on whose face the light was concentrated where she stood above in the narrow entrance, looked him up and down with admiration. 'So you are Will Hapgood? A foolish, bold young man. It was your boat I flew my signal to? Yours, Will Hapgood? I recognise your boy's features as on the day you ran here from your mother, and I did you a good turn with her. Yes, it is the same lad.'

Her dwelling on his name—the depth of some passion (it could not be any in which he shared, but it was real and intense) betrayed by her speaking eyes, the opposition visible in her maid's attitude, wrought such a ferment in Will's brain that he went clean out of himself.

'Yes, my boat,' he exclaimed; 'it is behind the rock here, and good men to manage it. Come, you are

free. Now, at once, no delay! You don't fear the thunder? not you!'

A second time Joan struggled to pull back Lady Liscarroll. 'I will raise the place,' she cried passionately; 'don't heed this crazy boy; he is wild with the love you gave him, and 'tis the worst sin you ever laid to your soul.'

'As sure as you wake the Castle,' said her mistress, holding her, 'I will go with Mr Hapgood. See if that will profit them.'

In sore bewilderment the girl stood irresolute. Hapgood urged his plea. 'This way, then,' he said.

His hand was grasping her shoulder, when the lady put it firmly aside. 'You are a high-spirited fellow,' she answered, 'but where would you take me? We can't go on the winds, like the Flying Dutchman.'

'Everything is settled,' was the impatient reply; 'you come with me. There's a cottage,' he looked at Joan, shook his head and continued. 'Mustn't tell you here. I will carry you wherever you please; the world is wide; I am here to live and die for you.'

None of this impassioned talk but was cut and slashed by the storm-winds, devoured by thunders falling on it out of a rain-darkened sky. It had pauses of deep and dangerous meaning; but now a red stain appeared in it, more dreadful than the gloom of that night.

'By the great God above, I will tell Sir Philip,' cried Joan, her nerves quivering. 'My lady, I never yet spied on your doings, nor was I watching to tell on you. That door I never saw open till this minute. But I say to you and this man from the mad waters, don't trust me. Go, and your son will hear from me the road ye took, and who 'twas that opened the Castle with the keys he stole. 'Tisn't you will silence or soften me,' turning to Hapgood. And to her mistress, 'Do now, woman—kill your son as you killed your husband. Can you deny it?'

These wicked creatures, charged home, are not invulnerable. For the first time during the interview Lady Liscarroll's blood mounted to her brow.

'My dear squire,' she said, recovering, 'I cannot let you be hurt. Who talked of injury to my son?' she continued, with a haughty glance towards Joan. 'When I was first mewed up here, I might have taken your offer. But now, these doors are unbolted, and I will not pass them lest Philip should think me unkind. We shall meet again, Will Hapgood— Ah, what is that awful noise?' she shrieked.

More than a noise—the resounding clatter of great masses torn from above, which fell past them in thunder on the strand. 'Good God, you will be killed,' she cried, thrusting him from her; 'get to your boat; leave this doomed house.' For other

huge fragments came down, and at the door of the High Room they could hear violent blows, and the confused cry of men broke on their ears from outside. 'Let me alone, girl,' as Joan still hung upon her skirts, 'I am not escaping. To your boat, Will, for my sake.'

She had shut the gate and turned hastily upstairs, her attendant at her heels. Tearing aside the tapestry, which now hung in rags, she passed into the High Room, where the hammering at the door continued and a tumult of voices, Philip's loud above the rest: 'Open, open; it is I—your son, Philip!'

On throwing the door wide she saw him, with Edmund and O'Sullivan, who entered in violent agitation. 'You must leave this immediately,' cried Philip, 'the tower is falling. Are you safe, mother? Thank God, thank God! Is Joan?—ah, you are up—no wonder!'

'Huge pieces of the battlements have come down,' said his cousin, 'and the floor shakes. Come,' as Lady Liscarroll seemed to hesitate.

Her significant looks had drawn the steward to her side. 'Shut the stair door,' she whispered. But the young men had gone into Joan's cabin and remarked the open door with the tapestry fluttering around it.

'See how the wind has shaken that panel loose,' said Philip.

'No matter; the stairs have long been broken and unsafe. But why do we linger?' returned Edmund. 'Hear to that, Phil!' And they ran back to the central room as a monstrous weight of stone shot across the window, eclipsing the moon in its descent and plunging madly into the waves.

'The ridge of the roof will be in on us,' cried O'Sullivan, as they fled; ''tis the last night of the Grey Tower,' and his singular expression of horror and dislike seemed to settle on Joan, who was behind her mistress. 'Some enchantment is loosening the stones, throwing them to Manannan to build a castle under the waters. Is it your doing, Joan O'Dwyer?'

So virulent was his tone that she turned to look him full in the face, and then a suspicion made her ask, 'What did you put in the broth I had at supper?' But she was sorry the minute after she had spoken.

'Och, nothing but slanlus and a pinch of lusmor,' said he, with a grim smile; 'your dada would tell you there's no herbs wholesomer.'

She knew the villain was lying, but made no reply. Her imagination—and her lady's, as she guessed—was abroad on the sea, watching Will Hapgood's boat in an agony of presentiment that from the tower some fatal mass should be hurled and sink it in the Atlantic.

But they were quitting the prison which so many

forlorn days haunted; and, on the stairs, the lights flickered, the wings of hurricane rustled ominously round them; while crash after crash the thunder rolled, announcing some great event in heaven. 'Where do I sleep to-night?' asked the lady of her son, on whose arm she leaned occasionally. Had Mrs Driscoll, who knew all her ways of old, been there, she would have discovered in her looks a mixture of fear and triumph such as the shipwrecked may feel whose vessel has gone down but themselves have escaped.

'You sleep in the large guest-room,' he answered.

'It will serve,' she said with a curious smile. 'Has it always the furniture of Marie Antoinette from the Grand Trianon?'

'Nothing has been altered since you saw it,' said he.

'That is more than ten years ago,' she murmured; and Edmund, who caught the remark, was astonished that she should touch that red-hot iron. Was it repentance or remorse?

The tower door closed behind them; they were on the marble Florentine staircase, when an appalling tumult proclaimed that, after centuries of wrestling, the night-winds had conquered the proud keep of Renmore. An earthquake passed under their feet. They could hear the masonry rushing down, floor descending upon floor, the wall at their back straining and groaning, as if it must fall with the rest. All

stood listening, an icy dread about their hearts, so pierced with horror and gaping on the next moment, which they might not outlive, that the women forgot to scream, the men did not stir from their place. Sounds as of enormous masses settling down followed the chief explosion. It was a risk to stay in the house, an adventure to go forth into the howling night. They decided to stay, and spent the miserable hours awake, attending to the irregular thuds and hollow grumblings of the stones, which gave way in the darkness, until day broke.

Then it was seen that more than half the tower had fallen, carrying with it the High Room, and strewing with its wreck the silver sands. O'Sullivan's foreboding was accomplished. But the sea chanted its eternal music, and the winds flew joyously about the ruins which they had made.

CHAPTER XIII

IUBHDAN'S MINSTRELSIES

EVENTS have a face for the world, but a heart for those who are implicated in their consequences. And these are not always alike. His neighbours condoled with Sir Philip, who had lost the jewel of his inheritance, thanks to a storm which figured long afterwards in men's talk. His own feeling was deeper and different. As soon as he could get speech of his cousin—they were naturally in a whirl of business for days after the destruction of the tower—he said without preface, 'Edmund, my mother must not stay here.'

'I thought you would tell me so,' replied the other; 'you fancy—'

'I don't fancy—I am certain. My father will not have her in the house with him. Rather, he would pull it down to the last stone.'

'With him?' inquired the poet, taken aback. '*I* might argue on this kind of supposition, and people would say it was the Leannan Sidhe overshadowed me. Where, in God's name, did you come by it?'

'Laugh at me if you please. Well, you don't—

so much the better. I tell you my father has come to me in dreams, night after night, his face flushed with an angry blood—above all when my heart was softening towards her. As I went about these rooms, I felt he was in them—close to me. I could almost put out my hand to touch him. Something without a voice—do you understand, Eddie, not a voice but a thought that lays hold of you?—said I was torturing him in his grave by letting her stay here. Then, as I wouldn't be guided, did he call up the winds and sweep the High Room into space? You wise men can't teach us fools anything we want to know.'

His cousin answered, 'I am really not superstitious, though I talk so, especially when Cathal O'Dwyer is about. Don't ask me to explain. What will you do?' Frankly, had he spoken, he would have told Philip it was all insane; the ghost was Lady Liscarroll, not Sir Walter, that had driven the young man mad.

'Joan O'Dwyer said there was an invitation to Silverwood—that day Miss O'Connor made her way in. Is there?'

No question could have been more unwelcome to Edmund, better by far acquainted with Lisaveta's idealising temper than was Philip. But evasion would not mend matters; he was compelled to answer.

'Then she shall accept. Once there, I need not

see her often; I can get thoroughly round when this sore in my heart is gone.'

'And who will see that it does not spread disease at Silverwood?'

'Oh, Joan will go with her. That girl has character, I tell you—steady as a rock. She will do anything for me. I'll make her keep a sharp look-out, and tell me all that goes on.'

'Well, perhaps it is the best *bad* thing to be done. I can't say I like it, Phil. There's Miss O'Connor to be thought of.'

'Think of her yourself,' replied his cousin, testily, with the peevish air of convalescence. 'Take her and Airgead Ross, too, and be happier than you'll ever see me, old boy.'

'We will do everything to help you,' said the younger man, softening. 'I have a good excuse to be over there these days. Miss O'Connor wants my advice—such as it is—how to manage her tenants. We have begun a regular confabulation, herself, the agent and I. Then she has old Irish customs on the brain—that is my doing, the other isn't; we are getting ready for such a May Day as was never seen since the Battle of Gabhra. But don't stay away altogether, Philip. It will put us in the wrong.'

'It kills me to see my mother,' answered Philip, with a groan, 'and not seeing her is as bad. I don't know what I will do. Tell her from me to accept your friend's invitation.'

'Your friend too,' said his cousin; but the other was not heeding.

'It is my turn to be on the spit,' thought Edmund; 'how will this poison act on a nature like Lisaveta's? Will it shatter the Venetian glass? or strike on its fine edge and be cast back? Saint and sinner don't match. Then that Russian frenzy! I can't see the road before me.'

However, it was done. On a sunshiny morning at the end of March, under skies of misty blue, they drove across the hills into a wide and winding glen, fringed on both sides with silver birch, that gave a name to Airgead Ross.

The hazel, rowan and willow stood or stooped about these glittering water-courses, and the Spanish chestnuts grew in noble clumps, making a delightful shade. Underwoods of fresh and fairy green, conspicuous among them the tall Osmunda, came almost up to the carriage wheels; little pools, cups of sunlight, spilt their brimming treasures on a rich brown earth, in places thick with leaf-mould, out of which the crocus and the violet peeped. Blackbirds sang loud above a thousand warblers, busy on branch, flitting saucily across the over-arching fretwork that made a screen against the vaporous heaven. And as the side-car which Philip drove turned up towards a long white mansion nestling close into the hill, they could see the golden-grey waves of the creek

laughing back to them through a tracery of fine sweeping boughs, fragrant as with apple-blossom. The land, the ocean, seemed to sparkle in a powder of gold, scattered over all things from the mild early sun, which was warm and not fierce. Joan felt almost light of heart now they were leaving Renmore. But as she glanced at Philip, and thought of Will Hapgood on that unspeakable night, a saying of her father's darkened the air: 'No man's life, however bold, is more than an eyelid's twinkle.' What a secret she carried in her bosom!

Lisaveta met them on the mountain-lawn, serious though smiling. She kissed Lady Liscarroll's cheek, and caught Joan to her heart, too shy for words, throwing towards Edmund a look of saintly, yet girlish defiance. After all his talk, she had her way; trial or expiation, the second act was beginning. 'This might be in the Swiss country,' said Lady Liscarroll, breathing free; 'how beautiful is your green Alp!'

'Edmund says it is the true fairyland, the Kingdom of Donn Firinne,' answered her hostess. 'We have the yellowest of sands, the greenest of trees, the tiniest of silver fountains, all shut in by yonder bareheaded hills. Don't you call it, Edmund, the Glen of the Luchra?—and those are the chief of the good people, aren't they?'

'Where the branches of the wood play, as you

are hearing, like stringed instruments,' answered the poet, 'their undertones in soft accord with the harp of Iubhdan, king and musician, who sets them going, if the old story is true, with a touch of his finger.'

The intense purity, thrice bathed in sea and sun, of all things about them made this fanciful dialogue seem in keeping; a wave of joy swept over their sadder thoughts. 'Come in first, and get possession,' said Lisaveta; 'we will share bread and salt and fire, then out into these little dells; I'll show you where I spend every hour I am at liberty.'

In they went, to a house not so large as Renmore, and far from as old, bright instead of melancholy, modern in its appointments, yet strange enough to announce that O'Connor's daughter knew how to fashion a world in her own likeness. The rooms had no crowding of ill-assorted styles; they were almost Greek in their severity, with woods in the natural grain for wall-papers, tiger and wolfskins for carpets, no gilding anywhere, and but religious pictures, icons on a gold or silver ground, in lucid colours, stately and slender, which made of the house a shrine.

One exquisite piece of marble shone white among these grave Eastern saints. A girl in royal raiment, its border crimson with serpents interlaced, a thin yellow fillet binding her hair, which flowed loose behind, her face lifted as though she sang, her hands

clasped over a throbbing heart. You looked down, and at the girl's feet a young warrior lay dead, the bronze spear by his side, the shield with its golden knobs held in a grasp that would never relax again; he was clad in scale armour, and his face had the maiden's beauty, boldly rendered. On seeing a group so lifelike, Joan started back. Her air of astonishment made Edmund smile. 'Don't you guess who these are?' he inquired of her.

'They're alive and they're dead,' she answered, wondering more and more. 'Poor girl, her heart is broke; 'tis that puts the song on her lips. Indeed, Mr Edmund, I'd cry myself was I long looking at the two of them.'

'It is the saddest, the tenderest of the "Three Sorrows of Story-telling," Joan,' he said. 'Deirdre lamenting over the death of Naesi, her youngest brother. When her song is done, she will lie in the grave by his side. An Irish sculptor carved it.'

'Yes, Owen O'Reilly, that neglected youth of genius,' cried Lisaveta. 'It was his last work. My father found him starving in Petersburg, and gave him this commission. He lived just long enough to finish all but a little of the ornaments; we would not have them touched. There was to have been a jewelled torque round the neck of Deirdre.'

Philip had been silently inspecting the features of the marble maid. 'Where did O'Reilly get

that face?' he inquired. 'Look at it, Miss O'Connor. Is it like any person you ever saw?'

She considered the statue fixedly, gave a slight start, and turned to Joan. 'My dear, how was it I waited until now to see what was before my eyes? Do you look—it is yourself!'

'Oh, not for the wide world!' exclaimed Joan; 'don't believe it; don't say it ever.' She was shaking from head to foot.

'Why, what makes you all of a tremble?' asked the Russian girl. 'Another of your endless Munster *pishogues?* Edmund, can you explain?' as Joan refused obstinately to say a syllable.

''Tis a relic of superstitions so ancient,' he replied somewhat uneasily, 'that I know of them only by hearsay. The people used to think if an image was made of man or woman, their life would sink into it, be swallowed up in the clay of the thing. Old witchcraft used to practise on these fears.'

'Well, it was not from you O'Reilly got the likeness,' said Lisaveta, putting her arm round the frightened girl. 'He travelled the country and saw some cousin of yours—don't mind it any more, Joan, dear. We will go up now to your rooms.'

But Joan kept her terrified gaze on the statue for several minutes, while the rest moved off. 'I'm there in the white stone, singing,' she thought to herself, 'and that is *buachal* in his grave at my feet. 'Tis no use to be talking; half the life is gone

out of me already. I'll never have a day's health after this.'

An inconceivable feeling of dislike and affection for this marble counterfeit of herself sprang up in the child; she was, or would surely pass into, the figure of Deirdre—alone and not alone—killed with consuming grief.

Henceforth, Airgead Ross, for Joan O'Dwyer, was the place of the statue, haunted day and night by her silent image, her ghost or double.

But the day, as they trampled on the golden seaweed and crunched under foot the white sand, was too glorious for the weeping strain; men have these felicities between hours of torment. 'My heart is like a sieve, holed by some sharp-toothed beast,' said Joan, by whom Sir Phil was walking, 'since I set eyes on that Deirdre, yet I couldn't be miserable here in the sun.'

They had fallen into a sort of confidence, unspoken but assured; this fairyland was their own—a soft, transparent brightness, in which they moved to the sound of Iubhdan's minstrelsies, shaking out sweet laughter from the branches, echoing down the rills that shivered with delight as they were churned into white water. Purple as evening clouds the hills hung in a sky now fancifully brushed with rainy outlines, which were dark and then light as the wind swept them away towards the east. 'You will be happier than at the Castle,' answered Philip.

'I shall miss your little songs, Joan,' he went on abruptly, 'but there is a thing I want to ask before I leave.'

'Wisha, don't, Sir Philip,' said the girl, her temples flushing; 'don't now bring sorrow into the day. Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies,' she concluded merrily, stooping to pull some quiet grey water-blossom and holding it out for him to see. 'Look, there's a creature of God was living with itself happy in the nest of the rock, and I killed it,' she said; 'let me be, Sir Philip, or you'll have me destroyed the same way.'

He snatched the sea-bloom out of her hand. 'You're brighter than that,' he said hastily, 'nor was I meaning to hurt you. My request was that you would let me hear if she—if my mother—they're gone on ahead, I must take the chance while I have it—should be doing what I don't want.'

It was on the tip of her tongue to reply, 'Put your commands on Miss O'Connor,' had she not looked up at his glowing eyes, stern and passionate. The words shrivelled as before a hot coal.

'You promise me,' he reiterated, while they paused without a motion, feeling how grave the situation was between them. Joan sighed, and shook her head. 'I'll wrong naythe you nor her,' she replied with sorrowful determination. 'An informer is what I never yet was, nor could be. I'd die first. They

say women are false and sly. If 'tis so, I'm no woman of them at all.'

'You are a provoking little fairy,' cried Phil, not knowing what a heat he threw into the words between his temper and his admiration; 'I didn't ask you to do mischief, but to hinder it.'

'I'm fond of your mother in spite of all she has done,' said his companion, slowly. 'I could not be the black spider, spinning a web to take her, though it was to lighten your own heart, sir. God knows, I think worse of all that's on you than if the trouble struck in here,' smiting her breast unconsciously, 'and I gave myself a promise'—she was thinking of the outcry she had made to prevent the lady's flight with Will Hapgood—'but 'tis my secret. I'll not tell it nor go from it. Will that satisfy you?'

The word was more than she meant. It shot beyond one mark and went straight to another.

There is an hour in the wonder-working spell—Nature's supreme enchantment with man and maid—when trust is all in all, faith lives in the music of a voice, the miraculous blossoms. It stood shining above them. That day seas and skies, sun and clouds and spring, in its white glory, conspired against these two. Their souls melted into unknown tenderness, belief, worship of one another; and Iubhdan, the fairy minstrel, laughed and sang delicately, mockingly, as if to every note they must throb and shiver. He, the hero, not beautiful on vulgar lines, but a man that

had sprung through fire, its ruddy light still on his brows, savagely earnest, his word a pulsing vein that would bleed were it cut into. Quite unsmirched by the world's dusty ways; shy and bold and passion-wrought to the highest he should ever attain; at this magnetic moment faultless. And she, not more innocent (believe it, though incredible), a flower like the Dark Roseen, some strange rich light streaming along every fibre, dew on every petal sparkling, the life within one radiant blush, confessed and unashamed. 'Will that satisfy you, Sir Philip?' said the lips, harmlessly, telling the whole tale.

They laughed; they were sad; they knew each other's heart; the hour had come of divine melancholy and rapture. In the shadow of death they laughed. Had she been a woman of his degree, Philip would have caught her hand, flung forth the decisive word—and they were pledged. But the most exquisite chivalry kept him at his distance. Faultless, and in love; such is heroic youth in the noblest.

'I am satisfied now, Joan.' His tongue could never be eloquent. Their eyes made up for it. 'Here is my mother; I must say good-bye.' The fairy harper's finest string was all a tremble as their hands met and parted.

CHAPTER XIV

CASTING A HOROSCOPE

Miss O'Connor was seated at a table covered with piles of documents, Edmund Liscarroll turning them over in moody discontent, and the suave Mr Nagle, agent at Silverwood, identifying with a pair of compasses the holdings on his map of the estate. A clear morning threw its ray on the marble group of Deirdre and her dead brother not far from them.

'The more you explain the less I perceive any end but one to it,' said Lisaveta, musing and unhappy.

'What end do you see?' asked Edmund. 'I see none.'

'Let us take a view of the whole dismal prospect,' she replied. 'From your maps, plans, leases, rent-rolls, lists of tenants, sub-tenants and their tenants again, Mr Nagle, I conclude that on my seven thousand acres I, the landlady, must be answerable for five thousand human creatures, all poor, most of them wretched, numbers famishing.'

'You take a very high standard of obligation, very high indeed, madam,' replied Mr Nagle, a quiet, grey-haired man, of medium height, polished and agreeable

in his manners, which bore the stamp of the old school in their marked deference to the person he was addressing. 'The landlord has his covenants with the middlemen, beyond which, in law certainly, he is not bound. Sub-letting has done the harm and multiplied this unproductive population; but as no jury would have enforced the clauses against it, I am of opinion that the landlord is not to blame.'

'But, Mr Nagle, it is my land; I get rent from every yard of it.'

'The middleman used to get five times as much,' said Liscarroll, 'and the man under him more again. We know that, to our cost, on the Renmore property.'

'You have every reason to say so,' answered Mr Nagle. 'These estates, and I could mention a score besides, have all been let on one system. The head landlord gave leases for lives, to increase his political importance. Then the middleman exacted the highest rent, and did well during the war with France, which made money plentiful. Now we have peace-prices but war-rents; interminable under-letting—'

'And the throngs of beggars round this door every morning, hungry as fieldfares in the snow,' concluded Miss O'Connor. 'But we still get our rents. How can I take them with a clear conscience? What return do I, Elizabeth Charlotte O'Connor, make to the five thousand wretches that earn them?'

'More than your absentee neighbours,' said the agent, smiling, 'not that I yield to the popular fallacy

regarding absentees. Many of the great English noblemen's estates are exceedingly well managed. Over-population is the national scourge.'

'Let me, as a fool and a poet, throw in my bauble,' said Edmund. 'After all, did you ever meet a happier, brighter, kinder people than you live among, Miss O'Connor? Don't they sing and dance—as they'll do here on your lawn at May Day? Their hearts are like a feather, though they haven't a sixpence in the thatch. What more would you want?'

The girl eyed him questioningly. 'Your talk is harder than your heart, Edmund, or I should tell you to go down and taste the fever in these streets of cabins, with hunger to give it an edge. Like a true-born Irishman, as you can't cure the disease, you play jigs to it. Now, doesn't Renmore cut you to the quick? Be candid.'

'What can't be cured must be endured,' he said; 'there's an old song for you we have sung time out of mind. Candid should I be? Well, then, Miss Lisaveta, the fortune of Ireland is before you in O'Reilly's piece of statuary. The soldier will be killed out, as you see him there—poor, proud, improvident boy—and the woman will raise a keen over his corpse till one grave swallows them both. The country is doomed.'

'Oh, you have watched the shadow growing larger—as I have watched it. The end—it is the end of our nation, if not of our race,' she exclaimed, heart-

stricken. 'We are all to blame; none of us can get off. But the people, who have sinned a thousand times less than ourselves, will suffer most.'

'There is every hope of an excellent crop this year, at any rate,' said Mr Nagle; 'from all parts I am told the potatoes were never looking better.'

'They failed last season, and the season before, did they not?' inquired Lisaveta, turning on the polite man almost savagely. He bowed.

'To a lamentable extent they did. Our peasants' farming is, I regret to say, ignorant and careless. The land is burnt up, overrun with weeds, exhausted by bad cropping, against every rule—in short, a good harvest is a miracle, for which we must thank the mercy of God.'

'Suppose that miracle did not happen this year? What would be the consequence, Mr Nagle?'

'God forbid, madam. The consequence would be too awful for human language to describe.'

'You, Edmund, with your vivid imagination, could at least picture it in outline. Would it not be famine, wide as the land, deep as the depth of those numbers living from hand to mouth? I had some trial of it in the year past, among these woods and lawns of Eden. To you stay-at-home Irishmen it is familiar as your changeable sky; a matter of course. Not so to me. I have lain awake, night after night, in fancy travelling over the land smitten with the plague—its crops lying in pestilential heaps, the people dying above

them; fathers, mothers, children ghastly in their nakedness—the country a stricken battlefield, its dead unburied. The dream—or is it real?—will not leave me. I walk in it even as I say these words to you. Tell me, in God's name, you men, what am I to do?'

'An exaggerated and improbable supposition, I trust,' answered Mr Nagle, with his not unkindly smile. 'It is against the calculus of chances—is it not, Mr Liscarroll? Two failures in succession we may conceive, but not three.'

'The moment I look into that cloud we call the future,' replied Edmund, 'I dread, as you do, what it may bring, Miss Lisaveta. Our people have staked all on a gambling crop; chance is no god I would trust. More—as Mr Nagle says—the land, the plants, the handling are equally bad. And the most of our tenants have nothing to fall back upon but the mealmen—God help them!'

'Nothing to be done—nothing to be done,' murmured Lisaveta, rising and walking about the room in strong agitation. 'We landlords can take our pound of flesh, with the blood in it, no Portia to say us nay; you poets can improvise a keen along the mountain roads, as you follow the coffin to its last home. Would there even be coffins for the people?' she cried suddenly, so that the agent turned pale, and Edmund looked at her in wonder not unmixed with fear. His quick thoughts had leaped with hers to a

horrible consummation. He saw the Famine slaying its thousands on a heap, with fierce delight, and thousands more tumbling before it. 'Your eyes pierce the cloud,' he whispered, in a voice unlike his own to the girl. She answered emphatically,—

'My mother had strange notions. I was taught by her that I never could do anything as I ought until I saw it in visible shape before my mind's eye. The habit is formed in me; *you* will not think it hallucination; it is your own gift when you choose to exercise it. Set these millions in their wasted fields, and say what do you see? That is the thing they will do, that will be done to them, in the day of their hunger. They will feed upon nettles and weeds; the mist of fever will rise about them; they will creep into the ditches and die there, by the visitation of God upon the crime and folly of man. Such a white death is my dream, which this very autumn may crown king of our millions—our millions! I see him coming up from the South, passing the rivers; neither stop nor stay does he make on the mountain-crest; he is lord of the Golden Vale, and away with him over plain and pasture until he reaches the Northern Sea. It will be the famine of the century.'

'An excellent crop,' murmured Mr Nagle, 'the calculus of probabilities! By Christmas—'

'The crowded mountain-sides may be a cemetery,' said Miss O'Connor.

'Or you may be laughing at your own gloomy presentiments,' said he.

'Why do the Irish gentry fulfil no part of their contract?' she insisted.

'It is not they but the farmers themselves that drag the life and soul out of the ground, as well as stocking it with a loose population, till it is no better than a snipe bog,' said the agent, severely.

'Can they help it if their boys and girls marry at seventeen?' threw in Liscarroll; 'what else is a man to do with his lads but divide the holding among them?'

'No coercive enactment is palatable to those people,' answered Mr Nagle, almost showing signs of temper. 'They will neither be said nor lead by their superiors. They murder the good soil; they lament here that we don't permit them to appropriate the sea-rack and burn up the fine land with it.'

'You know they call it the "running weed that God sends in to them"; why should it be mine instead of theirs?' cried Lisaveta. 'I declare to you, Mr Nagle, when those boys clifted the cows over the rocks at Glenmasson, cruel as I thought them, I felt they did it more from exasperation than villainy.'

'For God's sake, madam, keep that opinion to yourself,' said the agent, alarmed, 'or we will be having the revels of the Rockites as they had in Tipperary. Don't you see them now pulling the heath for sale, and "stealing mountain," so they term

it, by the furlong? and there's the bog-stuff they use for manure, to say nothing of the pernicious sea-sand, the burning itself of the soil, and—'

'But I see here,' interrupted Lisaveta, 'that we do what Cathal O'Dwyer charged upon us landlords in my hearing, and I would not believe it. We set the wild, sunken rocks in with the land, to get a rent from them.'

'Land is land, whether at sea or on shore,' answered the agent; '"he owns all at low tide and at flood," says their own proverb of the landlord. If the natural indolence of our farmers, big and little, did not encourage them to waste five good months of the year, it is long since they would be independent of a thing that one tide brings in and another may carry out.'

'Well, but, Mr Nagle, as we should not be trusting, like our rude ancestors, to the acorns that hang on the oak and the wild honey in crevices of the trees, surely you can tell us how to begin our improvements,' said Liscarroll, taking up the sketch map. 'Look at these colours,' he went on, pointing them out to Miss O'Connor; 'much of your estate is held in rundale, and it is striped like the coat of the roving Kern—a plaid wouldn't be more so.'

'Take a patch of it from any one of them,' rejoined Nagle, 'and they'll get demoralised, and savage, and wild. The man would be every day watching it, though he lost it twenty years back.'

'But if you gave him as good a patch elsewhere?' said Edmund.

'He will not be satisfied but with his own. Double the quantity wouldn't pacify him. Still, I say to Miss O'Connor, in this way we will have to begin. Improvement and ejectment—but without violence or hardship—must go together. Money will be demanded, and that not trifling.'

'I have the money,' said Lisaveta; 'don't let that stand in our way.'

'You are happy to say it,' returned Edmund, with a certain bitterness; 'at Renmore we shall improve when we are rich—and not till then. Our interests were mortgaged, encumbered—I don't know what all—ages ago.'

To the cautious agent, who had thoughts of a possible alliance between the two houses, talk of this kind appeared no less youthful than ill-timed. Miss O'Connor was wealthy enough to choose her husband; the Liscarrolls dated back to Richard I., and it was in Mr Nagle's blood, as in that of every genuine Irishman, to respect a family which had struck its roots deep in the soil. Why dilate upon mortgages and encumbrances? They could be paid off.

'My plan would be this,' he said aloud, 'emigrate the cottiers that have no hold on the land. It will cost a few pounds a head, but will repay you. Get possession of the small broken farms; square them to a reasonable shape; plant the houses convenient but not too near to each other; let six acres be the least

size of a farm, or maybe seven, so that a man will have enough to sustain his family in comfort. But I have it all down in black and white for your inspection and approbation, Miss O'Connor.'

'Emigrate, eject, clear off the land—I don't fancy the sound of it,' said Lisaveta; 'what think you, Edmund?'

'I shouldn't bless the hand that turned me out on the Atlantic,' he answered. 'By the crook of Saint Finbarr, it is a queer country altogether. The landlords won't live in it—the tenants can't. Who has bewitched us?'

'Thank you for your great trouble,' she said to the agent, as he began to arrange his papers; 'leave these for me to think over them.'

'No hurry at all,' said he; 'till harvest we can stir not a step. It is an operation will be spread over several years; but a beginning might be tried upon the most impoverished tenants and hangers-on that now disgrace the property. I would not advise an immediate or exuberant expenditure.'

Edmund, in his half-serious, half-jesting way, turned to the lady of Airgead Ross. 'My heart bleeds for these paupers — they are the old Irish, Firbolgs, Fomorians, Milesians—the antique world of tale and song, fighting and love-making; but if they must go, I declare to God a short, sharp famine would be my choice for them.'

On his lips the young man had a doubtful smile; but his voice choked.

'You would see them die of hunger?' asked Lisaveta, reproachfully.

'I am taking your advice, trying to follow them across the ocean—into cities where they are strangers —among nations of the modern style. They scatter, sink, fall, forget the old legends, the old virtues. What will their grandchildren be like? Will they keep the Celtic heart of religion and poetry? Who shall dare to say? Let them die at home in God's grace.'

'I want them to live, not to die—our kith and kin,' answered Lisaveta, running up and kissing the cold, marble cheek of Deirdre, on which she left the sign of a tear, 'my own people and yours, Edmund! How shall we save them?'

'God knows,' he said mournfully; 'I fear we don't.'

CHAPTER XV

ST BRANDAN'S KITCHEN

As the poet was riding thoughtfully home that afternoon, in the lengthening shadows, he saw before him a horseman on a powerful bay horse which went slowly, as if tired out. Coming nearer, he recognised the steed and its rider, whom he soon overtook. 'Why, Will Hapgood,' he exclaimed, drawing rein, your animal seems no better than a foundered nag. Have you been racing with Finvarra?'

'He's gone a certain number of miles, over deuced stony roads,' answered Will, rather sullenly, 'up Killarney way.'

'Come in and put up at the Castle,' urged Edmund; 'you will never get to Derryvore at that rate. Come and dine with Phil. We have not seen you for a dog's age. Give your horse a rest, and stay the night.'

'Thanks, I'll push on. Expected at home, you know. Promised—mustn't disappoint. We shall meet at Silverwood, May Day, if not before. Ta-ta. Regards to Phil.'

He stumbled along hastily, as warned by the falling

night; but it was a good while ere the fagged hunter vanished among the hills. Edmund diverted his thoughts from the encounter to a fancy which had ridden all the way with him, excited by Miss O'Connor's prophecy of misfortune to the harvest. Like her, but in a different key of imagination, he possessed a creative eye, which bodied forth the forms of things unseen by his neighbours. And now he was brooding over the agent's denunciation of early marriages, the doom of famine which might be at their gates, the dispersion of his beloved people into all lands across the 'stammering sea'—thus happily named by a Celtic bard. The vision dismissed Will Hapgood lightly. So blind are we at our best!

But he thought, 'How if "Time the Shadow—Death the Skeleton," reaping their black harvest together, came upon my rosy Cupid, the curly-headed, the bold-faced, flying low with his wings all sunny, through the bright air, his golden dart almost loosened from the sting? They strike him to the marrow with rusty iron swords, and he falls like a bird that has been shot—one sudden gleam lighting round him where he tumbles on a heap of dead. His eyes aflame laugh indignantly yet; his hand grasps the magic bow; he is smiling for the last, last time; but the sky is one cloud, the earth an open grave. Suppose this be our last May Day, merry and glad, but the crimson heaven descending upon it, I would write "Love's Farewell to Erinn"—a keen over the

murdered god. Should it not be in the measure of MacLiag's Lament at Kincora?'

Thus he, with a poet's second sight—for it came to pass even as the vision foreboded; the last days of that Ireland, careless, jovial, amorous, with all its high spirit, were running into the lees; it was an hour of sunset, bloody as though some battle of gods and giants were fought on the ramparts of heaven. The young Irish Cupid had not long to live; he must make haste with the dance, the melody, the symbolic play bequeathed from of old, when the land decked herself as a bride for La Lughnasadh, the wedding-day of a nation that took its pleasure in love and war. Henceforth his fires would be quenched, his shining arrows broken; young men and maidens would flee their native land in despair, or die at home unwedded. The mighty Famine was now to claim Erinn as his bride.

While this general sorrow hung almost visible in the air, long foreseen by the wise, heralded in more than one famine to little purpose, misfortune of another kind was menacing the House of Renmore. Its evil genius had been cast out to Airgead Ross; and the reader feels certain that when Will Hapgood talked of having ridden 'Killarney way' he was lying. Early in the morning he had set out on a roundabout journey; before noon he was face to face with Lady Liscarroll in the woods that came down to a wild seashore,

marked by St Brandan's Kitchen, a ruin of great age and medieval masonry, said to be infested by demons; a terror to landsman as well as seaman, who left it to the unearthly tenants no power could evict.

Will's horse was tethered to a broken pillar, and the young man, palpitating as if he had ridden a steeplechase, entered the enclosure which long weeds and grasses made almost inaccessible. Tearing them aside, he pushed on to where a small window gave light, and a woman, veiled and cloaked, came forward to meet him. Their hands touched. In his the fever of a terrible infatuation might be felt. The perspiration stood on his forehead.

'We are both mad to be meeting here,' said Lady Liscarroll. 'I shall be missed at the house. And you?'

'Never mind me,' answered the Wild Huntsman; 'I had to see you once, to make sure you were not a prisoner still. That awful night! The crash of the Grey Tower! We heard it; we saw the battlements falling in—the moon standing over them. Were you dead or alive we did not know. Pity me—I had to bear that doubt—how long? An eternity, I thought.'

'Better had the night finished me,' she said. 'But, no, I am thankless to you. And was I not anxious? In an open boat—the sea raging—had you gone down, I should have been your murderess.'

'No, no,' he replied, almost gaily. 'Who could blame you? The adventure was mine, only mine. But you should have sent me an answer to my letters by O'Sullivan. I had to act in the dark.'

'I put no trust in him,' was her answer; 'he is devoted to Sir Philip, and has always made mischief. But let us move into the open; this place stifles me.'

They traversed the wet grass, and halted outside, under the shadow of a high sandstone rock from which the waters of the bay were seen glistening.

'Didn't you run a frightful risk—on that lee shore—in such a wind?' began Lady Liscarroll the second time.

'Felim O'Riordan knows every inch of it. We had our hands full, no doubt. However, you would have been safe,' he rejoined, with a fierce touch of disappointment. 'What kept you back? Not cowardice, I know.'

'That girl Joan threatened us with Philip.'

'What do I care for Philip?' he was bursting out. 'I beg your pardon. He is your son; but why didn't he take your part against the world?'

She eyed the furious young squire with curiosity. 'I shall manage Philip,' said she; 'that is my reason for staying with Miss O'Connor. Don't cross my plans, Mr Hapgood. I want you to know them. But first tell me what put you on that chivalrous notion of a rescue?'

He could not unravel the character of the woman; was she playing with him, the hook in his gills, as he would have played with a salmon out in the bay? No matter, the perplexity threw more sparks into his passion.

'What I intended you can read in my face,' he answered hotly. 'Of course you hardly remember a lad you were once kind to; he had got into a scrape at home, ran away to Renmore, to Nora O'Sullivan, wouldn't go back; talked of throwing himself into the creek sooner; you heard him sobbing, the little fool, and—yes, you forget! I don't.'

'Neither do I,' said the lady; 'that lad looked so desperate—it became him very well,' she continued with a smile; 'I was not too happy myself. We kept you the night—made you sleep in Phil's room—next day got your mother to send her forgiveness. A small thing to be remembered!'

'I would have done something to myself but for you,' he said; 'always was a hot blood. And you spoke—there was that in your voice—like no one I ever heard. Oh, how sorry I felt when the country talked, after you—'

'After I took to flying with the wild geese—that was O'Dwyer's word to me,' she concluded, slightly blushing. 'I see the rest. You couldn't bear the thought of me in that horrible Grey Tower — the O'Sullivans were at your beck and call—you wrote, you waited—'

'Every night for over a week I was prowling about the rocks, expecting a signal. I had got the tower door to open, put up a long ladder; even tried the panel at the head of the stairs. But you gave no sign; at last, I had to venture. How could you refuse?'

'My dear Will,' she answered, giving him the frankest of smiles, 'now I know all this my heart rejoices that I did hold back. I have enough on my conscience. Why destroy everyone who comes near me? Shall I tell you what my life has been?' Her voice sank.

'Not to me,' he said, his face and eyes one glow; 'to me that is nothing. Don't turn those pages—tear them out. I ask are you free? you stay at Airgead Ross willingly? Otherwise, come. I will put you on my horse, and take you wherever you choose. Say the word. There is the sea and liberty,' pointing before him.

'All I wanted was a friend; now I have one,' she replied, darting a ray of sunshine into Will's brain. 'Yes, I am as free as I can ever be in this detestable country. Take my thought in a sentence—Miss O'Connor must marry Sir Philip. In that way I make up to him for the past.'

Will's countenance fell. What signified to them Sir Philip and his fortunes? A fire such as now kindled his deepest being put out all lesser lights; besides, he hated the young master of Renmore, seeing in him only an executioner.

'They say Edmund is the favourite,' he answered at length, sulkily.

'Do they? All the more reason why I should not leave this house. Edmund, indeed! A charity brat, penniless like his father—taken up by Sir Walter to spite me—one that always behaved as if I were worse than a stepmother to him. No, I will see that he doesn't get the broad acres of Silverwood.'

'Nor the purse of Miss Lisaveta,' said Will, entering into her humour.

'Not a farthing, if I can help it,' she rejoined, vehemently. 'Now I will never ask a quick-tempered boy like you to interfere,' she went on, partly to provoke him, but as much by way of trying how far she could venture. 'However, if you must quarrel, let it be with Edmund.'

'Fight him? With pleasure. Shall I pick a quarrel with him at once?'

'La you now, what a spitfire!' she said, laughing. 'Wait a bit. He is in requisition for May Day.'

'Well, after May Day,' replied Will, seriously. And then the lady took him by the arm. 'I was only joking,' she said, looking him straight in the eyes. 'Duels have gone out of fashion. But Phil, not Edmund, is to get the great heiress; if you, or anybody, can put a spoke in my nephew's wheel, I sha'n't break my heart.'

'It is always the simplest to fight a man,' argued her cavalier. 'I'm not much good at anything else.'

'In this case, I forbid fighting,' said Lady Lis-

carroll. 'But you must leave me now. I reckon you my champion always—that night of storm you went through death for me. Will you wear this?'

It was a long thin chain of Indian gold,—such as men attached to their watches and wore about their necks half a century ago, finely-wrought and of some value. Will took it—then hesitated.

'Had I any other trinket, I would offer you that, but I am a pauper,' she said bitterly. 'Nay, you shall not give it back. Someone—it matters not who—left it with me. He is dead. I make you his heir.'

Will Hapgood was startled. He wondered if she meant the English soldier—Henry Lifford—whose name was darkly associated with hers in a story often told but never cleared up to his satisfaction. The chain had perhaps been his; and he was a suicide, the whisper went. Impossible to thrust it into the lady's hand again. But he wished the token had been something else.

With a sad feeling he put it to his lips and hid it within his breast-pocket. Then he pulled himself together valiantly. 'We are not to allow this marriage between Edmund and Miss O'Connor,' he said at parting.

'It must never take place,' she answered firmly.

'Even if I have to challenge him,' rejoined Hapgood.

'It will not be required,' was her answer.

'Leave that to me,' said Will, and he rode away.

CHAPTER XVI

THE LAST MAY DAY

On May Eve there was a fall of clouds at sunset, threatening wind and rain over the glens, the green lawns, and the high barren hills about Airgead Ross. The sky was chequered with many doubtful lights, peering between banks of storm and the scudding rack. And more than one said to Cathal O'Dwyer, setting out that way late, 'We'll have Kerry rain for our drink to-morrow. What will you do thin, Cathal? Your great festival will be the haven roaring, and the flood under and over you.'

'Bate no hound without his fault,' answered the wizard, confidently, 'nor be putting your skian into the hollow of your own side. That wind will be met by a second, red from the north, and more ferocious. 'Tis not rain I'm in dread of, but last year's blight on the crops, should it return. And God forbid!'

'God forbid, indeed,' said Garret O'Riordan, who was within earshot. ''Twould be the most unfortunate thing ever happened to us.'

''Twould sweep up the whole world's valuables

into the hands of the malemen, bad cess to them,' said his brother. 'But anyhow, Cathal, knock a fine May Day out of it for us, and 'tis unknownst what'll you get.'

'Never trust me if I don't; call me a *scológ* to my face, and strike me with sledge-hammers,' he replied, gripping their hands heartily, 'if I'm wanting in power when ye meet me on the meadow at Airgead Ross. Merriment shall increase in ye young men, kindness in the women (God knows they'll be the better for that same), audacity in the hurlers and jumpers, and grace, vivacity and spirit in every dancer that leaps off the ground. Good-night, and joy be with ye all,' he concluded, turning his face to the mountain road.

His prophecy came true. 'The shining god that made heaven with its clouds' had brought up one wind to chase it away with a mightier, headlong from the north. May Day wore a bright face, dashed at morning with cold drops, then tranquil and sun-flushed. Its colours, exceedingly pure, faded out towards the ocean in a tinge of melting blue, but elsewhere displayed the spring favours of an intense green and blossoming white; for in these sheltered spots the season moved happily onward. 'A gold-smith's fire' up in the sky threw off its yellow sparks all round, playfully scattered on the laughing waves or shooting down through the branches into a dimmer atmosphere.

There was not one that came to Airgead Ross that May Day—and hundreds travelled from villages far and near—but saw the place with Cathal the wizard's eyes. He had made a cast of his art; the magic held them. Yet perhaps it was not needed. Singular indeed was the spell of those wide-branching airy woods, their little white rills musically plashing, the ground decked with ferns, asphodels, shyly-peeping, sweet-scented flowers, that flung on the breeze a balm of Paradise. The birds were not silent, but their music made a subdued accompaniment to the voices and the shouting, to the laughter of young girls, and the high-pitched tones of Kerry, clear as a thrush's call. And the softly-undulating fringe of purple sea ran round these woodland recesses, or became discernible unexpectedly in their depths, giving to the landscape a strange aerial brightness as though beheld in a dream.

'This is the Land of Youth, the country under the waves,' said Edmund to Lisaveta, where they stood on the green mound, conspicuous by its May bush, the hawthorn in blossom, round which the dancers were to move before long. 'Do you know that except in Ireland there never was a true Fairy Queen? The poets have lied about it charmingly, but so it is. To-day will you choose to be Queen Mab or Queen Aine, or Cliona of Glandor? I believe the O'Connors are related to the Good People.'

''Tis a clear pedigree, extant yet for constant

recitation,' said Cathal, overhearing the remark as he bustled past. 'I could give three parts of it now, was not Lucifer at my heels in the shape of fiddlers and dancers approaching. Your pardon, madam.' With a bow and a flourish he was off.

'Our Druid is like the magpie,' said Edmund, looking after O'Dwyer, 'one half of him is white, the other half black. Full of wisdom, not empty of liquor; to use his own words, "at times, your honour, greatly bibulous." He cuts deep with his tongue, I am afraid. He is too fond of satire, but the days of Aitherne are past. He will pay for his "jocose banterings and imprecations"—that is Dr Driscoll's word—sooner than he thinks. As I came along this morning I met the doctor.'

'His very sight sickens me,' interrupted Lisaveta. 'I never could, as the people say here, cotton to him.'

'You are not the only one. But, however, he shouted to me across the gap that yesterday Mr Davy Roche, the butterman from Cork—'

'With his coat buttoned behind him,' exclaimed Cathal, emerging on them of a sudden round the other side of the hill. 'Mr Edmund, a thousand pardons, but I caught the name that sticks in my gizzard always. Don't mention it this day, for your mother's soul! *Favete linguis!* To that land-sucker—a man better endowed with miserliness you never clapped eyes on—I make a present of every curse I have to spare from the rest of his

family. May he live to want tin times every pound he never spent nor squandered!'

With a grim smile he went down to the meadow, now fast filling as the bands of country-folk, their fiddlers playing before them, came out from the glens, or up from the thickset hovels along the shore. Voices swelled in a confused, not unmusical clamour above the shrill violins, which seemed to march upon the wind in a straggling and interrupted procession. Stewards, wearing the O'Connor badge—a seal in silver on a blue ground—met them at the gates of the demesne, marshalled the lads by themselves in long columns, and sent the lasses on, with more laughing and joking, to their own side. 'In a few minutes,' remarked Edmund, 'these lines of young men and maids will join hands in the great snake-dance, following the course of the sun from east to west. It is well he is shining bright to-day.'

'Who leads the girls off?' inquired Sir Philip—he had arrived later than Edmund, and was now standing by his mother's side, intent on the scene, his eyes not so fatigued as usual.

'Out of regard for Cathal O'Dwyer, who is master of the revels, they have chosen his daughter Joan,' answered Edmund. 'There she is with the old man. Find me a prettier Irish girl among them,' he continued, turning to Lady Liscarroll, who sat a little apart, busy with her memories of former times.

She shook her head and smiled. 'Voice, step,

figure, there is none to equal Joan,' was her candid reply. 'A little too spirited, perhaps. She is lively as a bird on the willow.'

'The captain of the lads will match her in good looks,' said Lisaveta. 'Look at him, Edmund, with his high crest? What a splendid piece of a boy!'

'It is Felim O'Riordan,' answered Philip, hastily. 'Is he to dance with Joan?' The warmth which ran like a spark along these words might have drawn attention; but carriages were arriving, with ladies and their squires, who dismounted at a little distance from the May bush and came up the hill on foot. Among them, as Lady Liscarroll anticipated, were Will Hapgood and his tall sister Julia.

Not the widow of Derryvore. She had been asked, but frostily declined; had her authority equalled her remonstrances, she would have kept the young people at home. But it was labour lost arguing with her son, and Julia, who had lately taken to calling pretty often on Nora O'Sullivan at Renmore, was resolved, though she did not say so, to get one glimpse of Philip's famous mother, the witch of the grey eyes. As well put a spancel, O'Dwyer would say, on the mallard and wild duck, as on young creatures in love.

The widow was left lonely. Julia felt the sting of a suspicion that Sir Philip's frequent absences from home, and his rides to Silverwood, gave Miss O'Connor a chance which she might take. This day

would throw light on it all. Unhappy Julia! There is a touch of the bitter as well as the comic when 'Apollo flies, and Daphne holds the chase.' Could she have seen Philip as he uttered his angry question about the lad Felim, what a blaze might have struck into her eyes! Only Edmund recalled that little incident—afterwards.

By this the elderly men and women were seated on the grass; the musicians, stationed at the foot of the May mound, were preparing to strike up, and the youths and maidens in a great circle had taken hands, according to the immemorial rules of the dance. But to those who looked on, familiar with old stories, the sight, however gay and frolicsome, brought melancholy thoughts; for what a contrast between the ancient splendour of prince and chieftain, Druid and Ollamh, in their many-coloured plaids, their crimson and saffron and purple, their fillets of bronze, and torques of gold, and this dark-vestured throng, where the women's blue cloaks and white caps gave the only vivid note, all else lost in a general greyness!

Edmund could have been sorry that they called out into the sun a spectacle so moving and so strangely desolate. The music with which the dance opened, mournful in its curious intensity, added to his pain. Nothing there was altogether beautiful except the sunlit world of the elements and that spirit of youth which sprang to love and joy. Fore-

bodings whispered still, 'It is the last May Day—the last!'

But the fifes and the fiddles quickened their time; the great serpent wreathed his living coils round the hill; snatches of melody rang from the lips of the dancers; a universal excitement awoke, seizing on spectators, actors, gentle and simple, to Cathal's unbounded delight, where he stood on the summit of the hill, watching them.

'Dance,' he cried aloud, mimicking the steps, 'dance along, follow the sun—'tis the true wizard's knot I have bound ye in—every youth with a maid in his right hand—the dance of life all Ireland should be dancing this May Day! I call ye, and I bind ye, and I put my spell upon ye! Here now, the Skelligs this very morning came out half way to meet the rocks opposite them; the sun itself is dancing over your heads; to it and take the life into your blood as ye twist and turn. The true wizard's knot—the serpent that curls round into himself, following the sun, his great god. Dance, my people, dance!'

His incantations were partly drowned in the tumultuous sounds of the music, and died out in a long half-savage scream. Cathal was beside himself —an Obi man intoxicated with the charm of his own power, caught up in a whirlwind with the hurrying crowd, master and victim of a magic that spread its influence like a contagion. The lookers-on, above and below the hill, sprang to their feet,

took hands, began, almost without knowing what they did, to beat time to the instruments, and were soon no less wild than the snake-dancers themselves, who kept up their interminable and tortuous rounds as if the day could not wear them out.

When O'Dwyer saw the movement beginning, he sprang towards Edmund. 'Will you lead off? You and Miss O'Connor?' he said in mighty jubilation.

The young man pointed to Sir Philip. 'Ask him,' he whispered. But the Baronet waved his hand disdainfully. With eyes and heart he was chasing Joan through the intricate waltz which went forward, ever turning with the sun; there danced, unseen, by her side, his ghost or phantom, and on the May mound he was insensible to all that happened. When, however, Edmund, smiling at the fit which came over his neighbours, offered Lisaveta the hand she just touched, Philip was in honour bound to do no less by Julia Hapgood. Irish girls, of every rank, dance like gipsies, and are never put out by a little wildness; they were soon tripping it to the lively measure; some in riding habits which they managed with a charming grace; and the May mound, as if it could stand still no longer, seemed to be whirling about its hawthorn-bush in a paroxysm of delight.

Will Hapgood bowed to Lady Liscarroll. 'A few steps, to keep up the spirit of the thing!' he said. 'Come—look how they are all at it. You must not be the one woman sitting still.'

'A mad pleasure,' she replied, without stirring, 'but it is not for me. What have I to do with their May Days—their love-makings and wizard's knots? Go, Will, ask a younger woman—my May is past.'

'Never for me,' he answered in a tone which was scarcely audible with passion. 'If you will not dance, my post is here.'

But Cathal now appeared, triumphant as never bard before. 'Your ladyship has a right to dance with the best of them,' he said, bending graciously low, 'I must entreat you. Not one here present but 'tis their duty to follow the course of that sun, the Bright-Faced, who commands on this hill. I am now putting into the hands of ye all this hank of yarn, to bind ye more surely with the wizard's knot.'

He seized Edmund, thrust one end of the magic twine between his fingers, and, running with the other, in no long while had brought the dancing circle round the way they were to go, until every man and woman there held the chain. Still, the fifes continued their ear-piercing notes—in an occasional pause, contrived not without skill, the violins alone were heard, sweet and plaintive, to be abruptly lifted on a deep wave of sound made by all the instruments and sent back from the hills around in echoing volleys. The double files of revellers were now intermingled; the immense serpent of the meadow had caught in its spirals the dancers on the hill; partners were lost, exchanged, found again; the music never ceasing.

And in one of these coilings and uncoilings, where all seemed confusion but flowed out into orderly and even exquisite arrangement, Philip held Joan in his right hand, their eyes meeting, their tongues mute. Neither could have spoken. The next instant, they had been carried in opposite directions; and while she danced back to her place, the young man broke out of the ranks, ascended the hill with a swift, unsteady motion, and sought Lady Liscarroll. His mother, who had moved two or three steps in the knotted dance to please Will Hapgood, was seated with her cavalier at no great distance from her. 'You are tired, Phil,' she said kindly; 'why don't you manage your strength? You forget how weak you have been.'

He was near fainting, and threw himself at full length on the grass. But was it fatigue, jealousy, or the wizard's knot, in the folds of which he and Joan O'Dwyer had entangled themselves? For young Hapgood the Baronet had no eyes; he was thinking of Felim O'Riordan and a remark more than once dropped in his hearing since the dance began. 'What a purty couple they'd make!' said the people, and that word was taken up by their betters, in admiration of Joan and the fisher lad of Renmore. It struck a blow on Philip's heart. Were they lovers? According to the strict law of the dance, lovers they ought to be. But no, he would not have it—the thing was monstrous. While he lay, breathing heavily, on the grass, Philip

saw what he had been doing—not at all so clearly what he must do.

After this heralds went about, shaking their iron chains of silence, as the old order prescribed; the snake-dance melted into air amid rounds of applause, and the games succeeded—all the sports of the country, hurling, leaping and wrestling, while their late partners sat and looked on eagerly at the rival champions.

So long as the youths contended in their sight, Lisaveta and her gay little court sat watching them from the festal mound. Calling up the wizard, she gave him such praise as made his old eyes water. 'You have enchanted us all,' she said; 'sit down now, and tell me the names of those young men. Who is the champion wrestler of your own village?'

'Ask my daughter Joan that,' he answered with a twinkle and a roguish smile. 'Joan, dear, who was it danced the sun-dance with you? Miss O'Connor would like to know.'

The girl, who had been seated on the grass at Lady Liscarroll's feet, in a dreamy silence, looked towards her father, blushed prettily, and with some hesitation replied, 'Didn't the whole world see it was Felim O'Riordan?'

'He dances like the roebuck,' said Cathal, 'and I'd be surprised if there's one wrestles with half his strength and agility from this to Tralee. Look now at the way he is lepping, and God bless you.'

'Is he a great friend of yours, Joan?' inquired Lisaveta, bending down to lay an affectionate hand on her shoulder and speaking low. Philip was near enough to catch the words; his heart seemed to stand still before Joan gave a reply. Tell-tale, it might be fancied, was the flush of colour that dyed her brow; but in these ambiguous tokens there is often a reserve, and no girl could be more delicately shy than the wizard's daughter.

'It was the mother of Felim and Garret reared me,' she said at last in a pensive undertone. 'The two boys were always good to me; why wouldn't I be as good to them?' An answer which sounded in Philip's ears worse than none at all.

'Your Felim has a brave look and a fine manly figure,' said Lisaveta. 'I see no one to match him among our boys. Happy is the woman that will get him.'

'You may say that, ma'am,' cried O'Dwyer, 'there isn't a girl in Renmore but was out before sunrise this morning to gather herbs for love-charms, and many a one will be putting her spell on Felim.'

'I'll engage you know a charm as strong again,' said Lisaveta, exchanging a merry glance with the old jester, whose eye had been fixed tenderly on Joan.

'Maybe I do, and maybe I don't,' he said evasively, warned by the girl's growing confusion, 'anyhow, Felim must try a fall this day with that big giant,

Darby Fitzmaurice from Glenmasson; 'twill be luck enough for him to bring the tall fellow under.'

During this talk, Hapgood was saying in Lady Liscarroll's ear, 'The fisher lad and his brother came with me that night. They will never let on—perfect gentlemen, you may be sure.'

'He is remarkably handsome,' she answered, a little wearily. 'Joan has had the pick of them. But she deserves a husband as rare as herself.'

The day went forward without mishap; between every bout of the games, music played and sober drink was handed round; for the great, the extraordinary movement of temperance had banished from public gatherings the old fire-water, yet their liveliness was more than it had ever been. All the matches led up by consent to the struggle for the champion's silver-studded belt between Glenmasson and Renmore. Felim had beaten every competitor on his own side, Darby the giant on his; they were now to be pitted against each other in a ring formed by the crowd, under a transparent but mild sunshine. 'You want O'Riordan to win?' said Philip, in a husky, quarrelsome voice to Joan O'Dwyer, who heard and saw him with astonishment. The master was a different man from her friend in the gloomy old castle —fierce and almost rude.

'I'd be the strange girl if I desired harm to my foster-brother,' she answered, throwing back her head proudly. Philip gnawed his under lip, and drew away

in silence. He could have seen the fisher lad flung over the nearest crags with pleasure. It was insane to be so moved; but the demon had got on his back and was now driving him at the whirlwind's pace gleefully.

Had O'Dwyer suspected the meaning of those glowering, half-maddened looks with which Sir Philip scrutinised the ups and downs of a match long memorable in the neighbourhood, he would have been at no loss to explain what followed. An eye so charged with jealousy could not but overlook the innocent Felim, as he stripped to his shirt-sleeves and put on the leather belt which was then used in wrestling. It was not Darby Fitzmaurice he need fear. The giant, though taller by a head than young O'Riordan, had neither his muscle, swelling bravely on the huge brown arm, nor his suppleness and quick turns when borne backward. In the swaying hither and thither, the rushing to this side and that which every glance pursued with breathless emotion, the Renmore champion was seen to advantage, and his fine play met with cheers from Darby's own people. But Philip kept a murderous feeling of envy which he hated yet could not throw off. It was as though he had staked on this paltry wrestling match between two peasants his life, his fortune, good or evil. O'Riordan must lose. Why? Superstition reads in the meanest omens what concerns itself, choosing them with a fatal folly. The young man fixed on this—and saw the wheel turn as at a gambling-table.

Not without incidents, dramatic and heart-stirring, did the match proceed. The victor was to give his opponent three falls. Once O'Riordan had been thrown, or so the judges decided, though he was up before he had fairly touched the grass. Nerving himself for a tremendous effort, but with a smile on his lips, the lad now took Fitzmaurice round the waist, made an admirable feint, and lifting him with easy, bird-like motion, stretched him his full length before them all. 'What a grace and lightness!' cried Miss O'Connor to Julia Hapgood. 'It is not mere weight —I could fancy the lad riding on a great wave and curbing it.'

Julia was remarking Philip's continued absorption in his own thoughts, and made no answer.

'By Heaven, he is down!' exclaimed the Baronet, leaping to the front. 'That is two falls in Darby's favour.'

No, he was not down. Quick as an eel, O'Riordan had twisted round, got the purchase he was looking for, and sent his man with a mighty shock to earth. Immense shouting seemed to declare the contest over. 'Darby is killed; he'll never rise again,' cried a score of voices; now it was Joan's turn to exult, to peer over the heads of the crowd, to hope Felim had made sure of the silver-studded belt. Again expectation underwent defeat. The burly giant shook himself loose of friend and second, wiped the cloud from his eyes, and grappled with Felim as a man seizes on a

plank in shipwreck. All sounds died, so fierce did the struggle appear, so deadly were the looks of the combatants. O'Riordan smiled no more; Fitzmaurice had the air of a wild cat o' the mountain, its claws in a living body. To and fro they struggled, almost touching the ground in quick succession, breathless both, hardly aware that the sun was over their heads. This could not last. A few minutes palpitating with the interest, the horror, which now transformed play to a battle for life, and they fell together. The ring was invaded immediately. After a short pause, the Glenmasson warrior sprang to his feet. But his antagonist did not rise or move. 'O'Riordan is dead!' shrieked the crowd; and Joan fainted in Lisaveta's arms.

Imagine the hurly-burly—Sir Philip, ashamed of his late cruel thoughts, broke in to where Felim lay prostrate, thundered to the people that they must give way, and, with Edmund's assistance, was lifting the unhappy lad, when Dr Driscoll, who had joined them on the mound not long before, took the matter into his own hands. He knelt and examined the body.

'Is he dead, doctor?' inquired a hundred voices, while Fitzmaurice was led away by his triumphant villagers to a neighbouring tent. 'Surely the buachaleen is killed.'

'He is not killed,' answered Driscoll, savagely, in a voice that drowned all others, 'but his collar-bone is broke. Bring me water, and don't be staring at me like a flock of sheep.'

The water was handed to him; after a while Felim came round and sat up. He was in great agony, but 'I'll go home,' said the courageous lad, endeavouring to stand on his feet.

Driscoll forbade him to rise. 'He must be transported to some place nearer than Renmore,' said the doctor.

By this time Joan had recovered her senses and came flying down the hill, followed by Miss O'Connor and the rest of their company.

'You won't let him die here,' she said with streaming eyes. 'Oh, Felim, don't die on us!' and her face was turned to the lady, wild and pale.

'Take him up to the house without delay,' answered Lisaveta. 'Edmund, Philip, get the servants; make something to carry him on. Trust me, Joan,' clasping her hand warmly; 'he sha'n't die if I can help it.'

They were already putting their arms under the lad as Dr Driscoll ordered, with infinite gentleness conveying him towards the mansion. He was hardly sensible, and like a sick child, with his arms round Philip's neck, a contrast, which many felt, to the figure he had made on the wrestling ground, the young fisherman was carried slowly across the lawn into the house, where they laid him on the first bed available. The sports had come to this untimely end, but far as the people might have to travel that

night, they lingered until word was sent out from the doctor that Felim would not die. His collar-bone had been set without trouble, for, as a surgeon, Driscoll undoubtedly knew his business. The consequences he did not pretend to forecast, but there was no reason to suppose they would be fatal. On this assurance, with a hearty 'Thanks be to God,' the revellers, now sad at heart, their music silenced, went home.

Much as she abhorred Dr Driscoll—the word is not too strong—Lisaveta could not suffer him to leave the house that night. By her entreaty the gentlemen from Renmore and old Cathal stayed likewise. 'How should I feel if anything happened,' she said to Edmund, 'and I alone with the doctor and a dead man?'

But O'Dwyer refused all comfort. 'Oh, Mr Edmund, if ever a comb was cut, 'tis mine—cut to the roots. This day should see me up in the stirrups, and I'm bate down like corn in a high wind. Where's the poems now—your own would be supreme in grace and melody—that those bards should recite to crown the day? Go, ask Darby Fitzmaurice, with a wanion to him! No contest of songs and musicians—but a broken collar-bone, God save us, on the best of boys—and May Day ruined!'

'I always thought the day unlucky,' said his friend, with significance. 'Was there any person

in your own house at Renmore to keep the fire in while you were here?'

'"Twould keep in of itself,' said the wizard, uneasily.

'Let us hope so,' was the dark reply; 'but do you get home and see to it.'

CHAPTER XVII

LANDLORD AND TENANT

FELIM was almost himself again next morning; and despite what the old schoolmaster called 'remonstrances and objurgations' on Miss O'Connor's part, he made up his mind to walk over the hills with Cathal to Renmore.

'Better the end of a feast than the beginning of a fray,' said the latter, delighted. 'Happy and glad will your poor mother be to get tidings of you from yourself. So, in God's name, let us go the road, like honest highwaymen.'

Joan, who saw them off, not without a sinking at heart, would have agreed with Edmund in calling May Day unlucky. It had brought mishap to young O'Riordan, and somehow through him a shadow between herself and Sir Philip. The impalpable was oppressive; she had never felt more ill at ease, and, as she turned from the door and passed up by Deirdre's figure of lamenting, superstition gripped her once again. 'The life is gone out of me into that white stone,' she thought. 'I could fall into a decline if I was to be long near it.' Everything tried her simple

and direct nature. Yesterday she had seen Will Hapgood offering a devotion to Lady Liscarroll that no one else seemed to remark. What would come of it? Surely no good. And Philip's wrath or moodiness—was he out of temper with Joan? But on what account? She thought of her father—kind and bright and unsteady—not to be trusted alone. 'I must give up this place, go home with myself, and never lave him any more,' she said at last. 'Dada has no right to be without wife or child—many is the thing, indeed, where a child would have more sense, God help his poor head!'

Meanwhile the day was changing from light to dark, a cold rain began to come down, and the sky, putting off its colours, turned to an inky sable. The travellers hastened their steps. They talked cosily of the blazing peat fire and the welcome that was waiting for both at Mrs O'Riordan's, not far from which stood the schoolmaster's cottage. But the rain caught them in a sudden sheet; they were drenched; and, as they came over the ridge down towards the village, a thick mist hid the world from them. 'Here's Kerry Law for poor pilgrims,' said Cathal, on whose lips the rain was beating, 'but, however, we'll soon be under a solid roof, not like the crimson-red feathers in the ould tale that every wind would scatter.'

'Under yon thatch we'll do finely,' said his companion, smiling, as the rain-cloud lifted. ''Tis mother's. She won't be expecting me with this

neck. Dr Driscoll was to lave word early that she should not torment herself—I was in good hands.'

The mist cleared suddenly, and Cathal stopped dead.

'What's on you?' asked Felim, pulled up likewise with a jerk. 'Oh, God in Heaven!' cried the youth, overcome by the same spectacle, 'is it your house I see in that condition? Cathal, man, what is come to the place?'

Cathal made no answer. His lips were dry, his tongue refused utterance. With a wild, irregular run he plunged down the hill, tore like a mad creature through the puddles and the unclean garbage heaped in his path, and, as if helpless or drunk, clasped with quivering fingers the post, against which he stumbled, of the cabin entrance. But door there was none. The entrance gaped like an empty eye-socket. Above, within, the sky glimmered through clouds—the roof of the cottage had been chucked off, broken to splinters, and in huge wet pieces the thatch, discoloured with vegetation, lay inside and outside the wrecked cabin. Its mud walls had been pulled down within a few feet of the ground. Where the fireplace had blazed, not forty-eight hours ago, a blackened patch was visible. Empty, silent, under the spouting rain, stood Cathal's home, or lay in mud and smut and mouldered straw all about,—the corpse of a home, torn to bleeding pieces by some vile enchanter. And the old man embraced the dumb wood, kissed it

passionately, and cried, with miserable tears, like an imbecile, saying he knew not what.

'Where's the few sticks I had, anyhow?' he shrieked furiously. 'Did he take them for the rint? Where's my books, my Greek and my Latin, that I had from my young days? Would they be any good to Davy Roche? Oh!'—falling on his knees and lifting his hands—'short life and hell to him this hour! God above, let him be without a bed, unless in the pit of damnation! Look at that flagstone, my poor boy; 'tis all the fire that's left me. May hell's cold flagstone receive and welcome him that quinched the hearth on me and mine! Oh, Felim, was this the May Day I left behind me!'

'Whisht, Cathal, whisht, my dear soul,' said O'Riordan; 'don't be kneeling in the wet and cursing that way. We'll go to my mother's.'

'I'll die where I lived,' shrieked the old man, tearing at his grey hairs. 'House and home are gone from me. The poor *tugurium* I had these thirty years—*mea paupera regna*—open now to all the winds of heaven! Trusting to the showers and the storms it is—without roof, without door! My own hands put in that door; how many times, sitting up on the ridge, did I thatch the place and get no allowance or compensation for it! God, is there justice at all to be had in this world?'

His loud cries and lamentations, borne on the wind, brought women to their doors; children, paddling like

ducks in the stream, barefoot and lively, began to gather round; while the schoolmaster knelt, his every second word a prayer, which, as Felim said afterwards, turned black in the face. That young hero was knocking violently at his mother's door, but could get no answer until his voice made him known. At that the door opened; Mrs O'Riordan appeared, her pale face wrapped in a shawl. She gave a wild cry on seeing him, and hugged the great fellow to her breast.

'Praise be to the Mother of God, I have you once more!' she exclaimed. 'Come in out of the rain.'

'But Cathal, mother—the schoolmaster,' he said, resisting. 'Don't you hear him screeching inside those four walls? What happened yesterday to his place? Sure, I needn't ask; but he is out of his mind with the grief and desperation. Come and spake a soothing word to him.'

Reluctant, with a scare in her kind eyes, the woman was led by her son across the threshold of the ruin. A larger crowd was collecting every moment; but they stood aloof, in silence, curious to see what would come of all this, held back as by an invisible hand from approaching. When Mrs O'Riordan went up to Cathal, there were significant shrugs and whispers.

'I am sorry, indeed, for you, poor man,' she said, wiping her eyes. 'But to think of Joan breaks my heart. 'Tis a lamentable thing for both of ye.'

'Don't name that name, or I'll lose my raison entirely,' answered Cathal, stretching out his hands in tremulous agitation. 'Was there ever a man—look on me this day, Cauth O'Riordan and say was any man ever like me? Without a wife, without a roof over my ould head, at the mercy of a scall-crow, grey of coat, sharp of beak, ready to rip the eyes out of every skull.'

He was a pitiable sight, stained with mud, rain and tears; his poor old garments draggled in tempest, his lips muttering incoherently.

'We'll get nothing by staying here,' said Mrs O'Riordan, who had looked away as if she did not hear his last speech. 'Come, Felim, dear,' and she was retreating, when the lad took O'Dwyer's hand.

'Lave this and come along,' he insisted; 'what use is there in these broken-down walls?'

'He must not come into my house,' said the woman, with a resolution that made her voice sound cold. 'You won't complain of me, Mr O'Dwyer; but we have all to look to ourselves.'

'What do you mean, mother?' asked Felim; 'he shall not come with us? What, the friend we always knew—Joan's father—not to get shelter in our house, and he thrown out on a day like this?'

'Have your own way, Felim,' she answered with a burst of tears; 'there isn't one standing outside but will tell you what orders Mr Roche gave yesterday, on the very spot where you are this minute, tapping

his boot with his cane. Would I begrudge Cathal O'Dwyer the half of what we have?'

'What orders did he give?' inquired her son, twitching as if Mr Roche's cane had struck a smart blow on his collar-bone.

'When the roof was pulled in pieces as you'd pluck a goose, and the sods of turf kicked hither and thither, he gave notice that any one of his tenants should not give shelter to this man, or they'd be turned on the roadside. "I mane," said he, "to sweep O'Dwyer out of the place. I'll now destroy the school on him as I destroyed the house he thought his own. I will let him know which of us burns the broom—and tell him that from me, with my compliments."'

'But this one night can do no harm,' said the fisher lad, wincing, yet resolute. 'The divil himself wouldn't drive an ould man from his door in the weather we're having.'

'There's worse than the divil,' answered his mother, with a sour smile. 'He's a bad landlord, maybe, but 'tisn't house room he denies to the people, nor the sod o' turf naythe r. I never hear tell that he evicted a poor sowl. Do you go in, darlin', and not be filling your young bones with aches and agues in the wet.'

'God direct me,' whispered old Cathal; 'I'm down if ever a man was. Grey hairs, look for no respect; don't think to have friends unless there's money with you.'

'Never say it,' exclaimed Felim, cut to the inwards

by Cathal's taunt. 'Let a thousand Davy Rocches come at us, 'tis not in this miserable way we will abandon a friend. Be the same curse to me that you put on him, O'Dwyer, but I will keep the door open for you. Man, don't deny me.'

The shawled woman was crying quietly in her distress and affection; the lookers-on, frightened as hares, began to moan with that peculiar wailing which rises suddenly to a shrill blast of lament from Celtic lips; it was a dirge, an elegy, over Cathal and his ruined walls—pitiable, ineffective; and the rain fell, the wind whistled, the crowd of women and children seemed like desolate sparrows, piping in the cold. They were all in rags and tatters, with a lack-lustre expression in many eyes which betrayed hunger. All dreaded the power that, when it chose, could fling them naked on the world, as it had flung the schoolmaster without so much as his 'two wives' breadth' of land to call his own. But of resistance they did not dream. Young O'Riordan's defiant cry found no echo in these women's hearts; they pitied his mother; they would have done what she did. 'If O'Dwyer made a better hand of his tongue,' said one tall virago, ''tisn't that would be happening to him now.'

But the wizard was buttoning his old blue coat, and grasping the blackthorn he carried. Again he pressed a burning kiss on the posts of his deserted hovel. 'Felim, you have my thanks and my blessing,'

he said with a certain grave dignity. 'Cauth, I am not vexed—don't believe it—that you kept the door against me. Tell me only what was done to my things—the little *peculium* of furniture and books I had, where are they?'

'Locked up in the bailiff's barn till you redeem them,' she said more cheerfully, feeling that he would not now take her boy's offer. 'You will surely get help from friends for that same.'

'He that sent us pigs will send us sheep,' answered Cathal, with pious, satirical double-meaning; and then, the tears running down his furrowed visage, 'God knows I wouldn't be sorry were Joan and myself lying in the one grave.'

'Yerra, man,' cried Mrs O'Riordan, 'time enough, time enough! 'Tis many a day in the churchyard we'll be. Have patience, and trust in God.'

'But since Joan is the only one belonging to me,' he went on, 'I will go back as I came to Airgead Ross. If I was a pig or a dog itself, I would be sure of some place to sleep in. Worse than die I can't.'

He waved his hand mournfully to the crowd, and with strangely vacant face was stepping towards the hill he had lately descended when Felim, with a loud cry, joined him.

'You will not travel the road alone—I'll go with you,' he said. The old man declined his company, almost in anger; a painful dispute was threatening, when Frank Hurley—'a gorsoon the height of my

knee,' O'Riordan would have called him, and, in fact, a sharp little lad, freckle-faced and fair-haired, with more brains than length of limb — ran up saying he had a load of turf to carry within three miles of Silverwood, and he was willing to drive Mr O'Dwyer the rest of the way.

In blinding storm they set out; their poor rags of clothes were soaked; yet before they moved down into the valley, sunshine was breaking through on every side, the clouds rolled off in brilliant masses, leaving a deep blue sky visible, and the song of birds was lively in copse and hollow. But neither for wet nor dry did Cathal unclose his lips.

Frank Hurley drove his cart up to the front door of the big house with a flourish and a clatter. He enjoyed taking part in a tragedy like this. From the window Lisaveta had seen with astonishment the wizard's return, and she ran out, in her impulsive way, to make inquiries, the two young men from Renmore, who were not yet gone, following her. But though she could ask, O'Dwyer could not answer. He was dead beat.

'Tis evicted he is, and his house thrown down,' cried the sharp little boy, full of his story. 'Mr Davy Roche, ma'am, said he'd make an example of the schoolmaster for a curse he put on him. 'Twas yesterday he made it, while ye were dancing and lepping.'

'But, my poor man, you couldn't be evicted

without notice,' said Miss O'Connor. 'Hadn't you warning?'

''Deed, and he had,' answered Frank, as Cathal would not speak. 'Last November every man in the place had notice to quit if their rint was not paid.'

'We were always noticed,' said the old man, with difficulty, as if dreaming aloud, 'always a gale, or two gales, of rint behind, and ejectment hanging over our heads. So customary a thing was it, we never used to mind till the bailiff stood at the door. Thin we paid what we had.'

'That is our bad policy,' said Edmund; 'one side threatens, the other delays till the last moment. I knew Roche had his hand ready to strike. Driscoll shouted the word to me yesterday as I came along.'

'So he threw down the house and the school,' continued little Hurley. 'The bailiff never let his eyes off you, Cathal, till you had your back turned. Thin, in with him.'

O'Dwyer started. 'I didn't hear the school was down,' he said piteously.

'Sure, Mrs O'Riordan said so, but you were on your knees baring your heart to God, and wishing bad luck to Roche,' answered the boy. 'Faith, they made smithereens of the school too. The divils o' childer gave a hand to it, and why wouldn't they? 'Tisn't schooling they want, but plenty o' praties and buttermilk.' At which the audience laughed, and Hurley felt elated; he was a born comedian.

'Let it all go,' exclaimed Cathal, in despair; 'my books are in pound, my ferule is in pieces, and my scholars take part with the Cork butterman. I must beg the wide world now. Where's Joan this minute? She is all I have,' looking round without addressing anyone in particular. His mind was grievously shaken.

'He said if there was a place for a pig or a dog at Airgead Ross, he'd be sure of one half of it,' Frank resumed confidently; 'I brought him to your ladyship on that account.'

'You did well, my boy,' answered Lisaveta, laying a kind hand upon the wizard's sleeve. 'I will find shelter for you, my friend,' she went on, 'and here is Joan to comfort you.'

The girl was entering from the woods when she caught sight of her father and ran to him. A second time the story had to be told—the more hideous the longer it was dwelt upon. Philip, who all this while stood silent, not greatly attending to O'Dwyer, now felt a strange uneasiness. With the management of his own property he had never interfered. Evictions were so common that a single instance had no power to move him; like most Irish landlords he was neither a profound economist nor a man of large imagination, and if Cathal had been childless, his misfortune would have sounded in deaf ears to Philip. But Joan's bitter, though controlled, agony was too much for him.

'We can't let this go on,' he said in an undertone to his cousin, who eyed him with some obscure meaning. 'Miss O'Connor, I think between us we should be a match for this butterman. He is a tenant of one of my tenants, very wealthy—I believe he holds a mortgage on the Renmore estate—but that is no reason why its owner should stand aside in a bad business.'

'God bless you, sir,' said Joan; 'help us now and there is nothing we won't do for you.'

'What would you think of doing?' inquired the mistress of Silverwood.

'There is that lodge in the park, Edmund,' said the Baronet; 'it stands empty since our keeper, Maurice Griffin, emigrated. I will have it repaired. O'Dwyer can live in it till we put him back in the village.'

'And I will go with you, father,' said Joan, her arms round Cathal's neck; 'I should never leave you as I did.'

'I spint the money you earned, my poor girl. Can you forgive a foolish ould drunkard?' whispered the schoolmaster, clinging to her like a child as he was, in spite of his learning and his flashes of genius.

'God go with it,' she answered; 'as long as we have ourselves we'll not complain.'

Philip had drawn close to them, while Lisaveta put more questions to Frank Hurley. The lad was narrating how Davy Roche, with his green-

coated soldiers, the police force sent to protect him, had invaded the village, served fresh notices on the tenants who held under him, warned every house that none must give shelter to the man he was turning out, and, after wrecking school and cabin, had departed, leaving his terror on this free and independent population. 'If he was king of all Ireland, he couldn't do more,' concluded Frank.

'Nor a hundredth part as much,' replied Miss O'Connor. 'He passed a sentence of death without judge or jury.'

'But will you go from my mother, Joan?' Philip was asking, divided between his wishes and his fears. 'I felt easy as long as you were with her.'

'My father is more to me than all the world,' she said passionately.

'Well, you are coming to Renmore. It will be like coming home,' he answered. 'The old place won't look so gloomy. I will see you have a lodging fit for you. No—what could be fit for you? But I expect you both this time to-morrow evening. Now let us break the news to my mother.'

His joy was unmistakable in eye and voice—a strange ardour in one so reserved, and very unlike him.

CHAPTER XVIII

HAWK OR EAGLE

THE tale now takes on a mingled hue—high saffron lights showing uncannily between clouds pitch dark —a spectral appearance we never see without astonishment on days when storms are abroad.

In the old keeper's lodge—around it thick brushwood, below it the sparkling Lonndubh, silent or singing—Cathal the wizard sat, his spells broken, his mind unhinged. The occupation was gone which made him first man in the village after Father Falvey—for he held himself more than equal to the illiterate Driscoll. Where now could he pluck up a spirit to dance the long steps, or short, which had made him famous? What would provoke the song, the merry word, in one who was ashamed to be seen in the street of Renmore, whose scholars had helped to pull down his school, and whose cronies were banished by Joan's presence from the hearth she kept ablaze?

Do not laugh at Cathal; his temperament, with

its fitful changes, was that of the poet or the actor, ill-adapted to the meridian of vulgar day; but given the opportunities he never enjoyed, this poor wreck of a man might have done brilliant things. 'I am not as I was, I am not as I was,' he would whimper. 'A great worm is gnawing inside my brain, as bad as Connor MacNessa's. I'm vanquished and struck by a diabolical being of evil aspect; but don't fear, Joan, I give the back of my hand to maledictions. They pulled the thatch on me, as Father Falvey gave out from the altar they would. Now I will be like Saint Mochta, that never ate a bite was fat, I'll curse naythe man nor demon, though Davy Roche would exhaust the vocabulary of every satirist on Ireland's ground.'

He kept his pledge, perhaps not wisely. 'Give sorrow words' is good counsel; being hindered of his peculiar, not to say piquant, imprecations, O'Dwyer sat brooding when he should have been up and alert. To his daughter he resigned the task of life; he had done with it.

''Tis an April fool's tale,' he would mutter, as Edmund attempted to comfort him — the young man liked, on rainy days, to while away an hour in fanciful and dreamy talk with his friend, who stirred out as seldom as he could help—'an April fool's tale it is, and I am the fool telling it.'

'You won't be always so,' answered Edmund,

humouring the old man. 'My cousin will find you a schoolroom yet; and when Joan is married—'

'Live horse and you'll get grass,' was the fretful rejoinder. 'Who would marry the poor *oinseach*, that hasn't a guinea to her fortune?'

'Sure, Felim O'Riordan would. He is a sober, steady boy, never in drink, and as good as a son to you. What else brings him this way so often?'

'I have nayther a cow's grass nor a quarter of red bog to give with Joan,' said Cathal, despondently. 'Bate and broke is her father, and the girl has but her spinning-wheel.'

'For all that, she would do well to marry Felim,' returned the poet, 'and do you encourage him, Cathal.'

The old man fell into his listless ways again, letting the world drift. But Edmund, who was soon leaving Renmore on a visit to some Galway acquaintances—the Stauntons of Altamira—had intended a real, though vague, warning against he could hardly tell what—perhaps it was the lonely situation of a girl who charmed his own fancy not a little, or pity akin to fear; nay, it might be the secret influence of a thought which had crossed his mind on hearing Philip exclaim against Felim's opening the snake-dance with Joan. It was all this, and more; he scented danger, but could do nothing except alarm Cathal, who would not take the hint.

'How long will you be away from us, sir?' asked the schoolmaster. 'Those Connacht people talk a strange Irish, short and sharp like the yelping of a greyhound. You will be sorry to lose the soft, musical Munster speech.'

'I don't know when my errand will be finished,' said the young man. 'It is on Miss O'Connor's account I am going more than my own.'

'Joy be with the two of ye,' said Cathal. 'I would not wish a rake of the world to have Charlie O'Connor's daughter—women are bad, but herself and my Joan are the best of them. We'll see you yet the Squire of Airgead Ross.'

'But, my dear O'Dwyer,' said the other, laughing, 'I haven't a cow's grass either. Is it for a poor man like me to be courting a great fortune? Would you respect me if I did?'

'Ayther yourself or Sir Philip must have her, if all I used to hear is true,' said the wizard, 'and though he gave me this bit of a cot, and his hand is open to me always, I'd sooner it was you, Mr Edmund.'

'The devil take gossip,' cried his visitor, impatiently. 'How easily it settles everything! My cousin and I have some right to do all Miss O'Connor asks, after what she has done for us. All her striving is to improve her property and the thousands upon it. My friends, the Stauntons, have done [illegible]th their own; she requests

me to bring back a report of the land. Why shouldn't I?'

'No raison in life, sir. Go, and Heaven's grace be your guide! But if we don't see the day when Renmore and Airgead Ross give a hand to aich other, we'll think there is no answer to our daily prayers. *Slan leat!*'

They parted, and another little drama swept this from the boards. Joan was separated from the village—her large world with its gossip for its conscience; she had no duty now to Lady Liscarroll, honourably detained at Silverwood. She was left to herself; but the experiences of the last months had brought her in contact with violent passions, new feelings, difficult turns of life; her father's suffering made the girl long to be happy. She could be very patient; but resigned she was not.

Her spinning, her small patch of garden, the dappled, fawn-like kerry of which Sir Philip had made them a present, took up many hours of the day. She was in and out, getting a livelihood for them both in a singularly primitive fashion—like the birds silent in the summer woods or driving along the seashore. But thoughts, fancies, regrets, longings, how could she not indulge them at her age? Edmund was right; peril hovered near. Had it shown as a hawk she would have run in from it. No hawk, but a wounded golden eagle seemed to drop at her feet.

Philip, too, had his world, into which he went less and less. The country houses complained that he was following Sir Walter's misanthropic ways, becoming an eccentric young man, who would end by doing some foolish thing, but would marry none of their eligible damsels. True, he was known to be embarrassed in his money matters; but so were they all, in spite of their getting large rents; for a previous generation had mortgaged Ireland in its fine, careless rapture.

And there was Lady Liscarroll! With a stare and a laugh they heard the tale of her dancing on May Day—those few, reluctant steps which she had taken with Will Hapgood were multiplied to a performance that challenged opinion. The Irish lightness of temper allows a good deal; it is not straitlaced; it would dance without distinguishing ranks on a holiday, and to-morrow all would be in their place. Yet who can marvel that Philip shrank from meeting the widow of Derryvore and adepts like her in the art of stabbing with questions? Thus the Lord of Renmore was abandoned to influences old and irresistible as Nature.

The wizard, if cross-examined at this juncture, would have explained all by a strong Celtic belief—Sir Philip was 'under bonds.' Not the vow which we take, but the burden which is laid upon us—a doom, a handicapping in the race against fortune—that is how we must render this deep, barbaric

thought, corresponding to ideas now not so much clarified as translated into another speech by our men of knowledge.

Under bonds to his dead father, not yet avenged in the grave to which a wife had hurried him; under bonds to that sin-possessed mother, mighty in her hardness of heart and blind obstinacy; under bonds to Cathal himself, whose magic draught had rolled away the mist from the stream on which Philip was floating out to sea. Who can escape his fate? This it was to be under bonds. In the stories which framed his philosophy and that of his countrymen, the schoolmaster would recall how every effort to baffle destiny led straight to its fulfilment. Perhaps he was himself to witness a new version of that wonderful saga, *The Death of Diarmuid, Son of Fergus*, which he had often told on a winter's night round the hearth, not without applause and shuddering. 'This is your road,' said Black Hugh, standing in the doorway, and he struck a spear in the king's breast that broke his spine.

They could meet in these woods, at the lodge, down among the copses by the river, in the hollow clefts of that ridge of rocks, even at the Castle, and who gave them a second thought? With his fowling-piece or his fishing-rod the master might be out all day; unless he turned up towards the village, he was in a solitary land, open-eyed to the sun, gloomed over

by the clouds, with an empty sea view before him. Joan would persuade her father to sit in front of his door on the fine days; and there the baronet could stand or pace with hasty strides, talking to his dogs, watching the sky in silence.

This might have been accident; it persisted in the pretence of a mere chance wandering about the banks of the Lonndubh; and neither of them was taken in, though both argued the point with a certain unwelcome disputant in their own hearts. Did Joan long for that highest berry on the rowan tree which the song warned her was bitter? Not even in her dreams; yet she should have partly guessed how it was with Philip. And he, in the most hidden folds of his self-knowledge, did he mean more than he said, differently from what he would have called a man's plain duty? The effect of all overpowering emotion is to forget the past, not to look beyond the moment. These are its bonds. He was in them irretrievably.

Another hint must be thrown out, in the most delicate shadow, just where the sun darkens and brightens again; impossible to say how instantaneously. With all her graces and refinements, Joan was of the people, bred up in a submission to the ruling class which Miss O'Connor declared no Russian peasant could rival. It was in her blood. Other feelings, and the example of a marvellous innocence all round, would temper the consequences

of this dread, which seized every man, woman and child in Renmore at the bare apprehension that their gods of the land were angry with them. But the terror could not be overcome, much less rooted out. Had Philip been a tyrant bent on evil, neither Joan nor her father would have thought it advisable to withstand him to his face. They would fear and tremble while they sought to creep away from the danger, like beaten hounds. Whoever chooses may still track the remembrance of these things up and down the wilder parts of Ireland. When the squire took notice of a girl in Joan's position, she had the alternatives of finessing or surrendering, seldom of boldly resisting. The *droit du seigneur* had not utterly died away.

But let this be a shadow, no more—enough to make the beginning easier than it might have been. Joan had the temper of steel; she was now to be tried in the fire. And Philip—how could he mean harm, or ask himself whether he meant it, fascinated as he was, under a rush of feeling, the like to which he had never imagined? His difficult, vexed, untamed nature was melting into ecstasy. Asleep or awake, this image he had before him, and all the pent-up tenderness of an affection which no one suspected, which not even his father had thought of ascribing to so inarticulate a creature, flowed out towards it. He was transformed or bewitched. Not all the arguments suggested by difference of rank,

education, manners; not the perils ahead, nor the uncertainty in which, for some good while, he felt as to the girl's own disposition, cast a feather-weight in the scale. That magnet drew him and he went to it joyfully, with a wild delight.

Nothing of all this could he describe or analyse; what cared he? As often as he might, he was strolling down by the magic stream, beating with a bold hand upon the door of the lodge, or, best of all, walking in a reverie which made the world an enchantment, among those rocks where, in a little time, she would be found alone. They made no plans to escape prying eyes; it may be questioned if he gave a moment's reflection to what he was doing. And she dared not. This whirlwind was carrying them towards a darkness her vision could never pierce.

The chief blame was, undoubtedly, Philip's. His love had all the selfishness that attends on desire long thwarted; but the lonely, the doomed, as he had been, to a solitude made for them by the crime of their nearest, are apt to claim this satisfaction. He had lost father and mother; his days were torment whether Lady Liscarroll sat a prisoner in the Grey Tower, or was out of sight at Airgead Ross. Who could prove to him that he must give up the fairy bride?

He would not—no, though the something unspeakable which was in the dark should make an

end of him. The delusion gathered upon his eyeballs, which, it must be said, he was inviting. To sacrifice himself, in a way not yet traced out, he was prepared, might he die with this delectable passion consuming his flesh and his spirit. He would have his love; none should take an atom of it; therefore he would be loved, at all costs—even to Joan O'Dwyer.

If not an insanity, it was a possession, so deep, so strange, that to talk of a power which held and spurred him on would be true to the letter.

Was it Philip *driving himself?* then we are to imagine *him* suddenly endowed with genius, his flesh all eyes and wings, his inner man rapt to some height never before ascended. What he saw in Joan was, to the cool eye of reason, a beautiful, childlike creature, very fair to look upon; what he fancied, in this kindling of all his faculties, those alone will comprehend who have a gift like his. It was a transcendent miracle, and never did a poet excel him in reading with Love's eyes the wonder of the world.

No verses did he scribble; he could not have spent five minutes over the most charming sonnets that were ever wreathed in roses. But he walked on air, drank in the sun; his nights he passed in trampling through the heather, if he did not prefer an endless meandering over the smooth, white sand of the beach; when morning broke,

he went up to the Castle, a great numbness in his limbs, the one madness in his heart. If not insane, possessed!

What defence had Joan against those ardours? It is well ascertained that love can compel love, where no counter-attraction exists to make a stand. Days passed; the face with glowing, masterful eyes, framed in its fiery locks, was burnt into her memory; the figure, tall and proud, was always at her side; the voice pleaded, though broken syllables, not sentences, dropped from those lips on fire. She had long pitied him; soon she was forgetting to pity herself. The wound that could not be staunched of his great shame gave to his wishes a persuasiveness, such as we yield to when the strong are struck down, and ask us whether we are going to forsake them. Pity not far from love—then the terrible joy which casts out pity; instead of air, flame, and oblivion of all that used to seem worth while. Lo, the god is here, chasing the past with golden arrows.

Who saw them? More than one pair of eyes, though silence fell over their steps. It was not really so long, measured by days and nights; but when every hour is quivering with bright gleams, the minutes stand out boldly, the torrent expands into a sea. Could they have had the world to themselves!—and why not? To all others they spoke hastily, in passing, eager to get rid of them,

as the poet scrawls a business letter and has done with it. All along they never knew what people said; yet, of course, talk there was, in secret channels, first one, then another—the serving men and women who, in those times of cheap wages, 'coshered and collogued' about the Big House. And then—

It was little Frank Hurley, the laughing villain, that told it, to begin with. Creeping on hands and knees through the brush, to lay snares for any wild thing, rabbit, hare or bird, that he could poach, the gorsoon perked up a sharp ear, an amused eye, and took in the meaning of certain tones, attitudes, what not, as the pair moved slowly in front of his ambush. He had the play to himself half a dozen times, after which he shared his knowledge and his roast hare with Felim O'Riordan. 'We thought you were to marry her always,' said the grinning Frank, with a glance at him sideways; 'would I get a willow-branch ready for you, Felim?'

The fisher lad took him by the two ears, and gave him a shake which left Hurley breathless. 'If you dar' say a word to any person but me,' growled O'Riordan, 'I'll smather you. Swear now you'll be as dumb as Patsy Regan—if not, so help me—'

'I'm not a *balbhan* like Patsy,' cried Frank, 'nor blind nayther, as you've been—and you're hurting me.

But, big as you are, here's my advice. Go to Cathal this minute; tell him you must marry Joan; and let him ask Sir Philip'—smiling mischievously—'to give a fortune with her. Do that now.'

'The hammer and sledge will be your fate,' answered his tall companion, thumping the lad as if in a mighty rage; but he acted on the advice before nightfall. 'Anyway, I'll get knowledge what they're doing,' he thought.

'I wouldn't require a crooked sixpence with the *cailin*,' he said, when his business was opened with the schoolmaster; 'but, sure, 'tis no compliment you're asking; the whole country knows 'twas you that cured Sir Philip after the doctors giving him up.'

Cathal's answer was prompt. 'If I did that same, I could not take the price of it, or something would happen to me. "Give all, sell none," said the master who taught me my knowledge. But, indeed, Felim, you're the one boy that I'd like Joan to marry. And I'll face the squire, but never a word that I cured him! 'Twould be worse than swapping prayers for praties—a thing I could never bring my mind to, or maybe I'd be a different man this day, for long ago I had the offer, if I would take it, from ould Father Lenihan, God rest him.'

No, it should be a simple matter of business. 'The one half of my torment,' he said, with genuine emotion next day, to Sir Philip, as they lingered in the sunshine, 'is Joan to be without a husband whin I'm

gone. Had we the bit of land as well as the cottage, Felim O'Riordan would marry her.'

'But would she marry *him?*' answered the Baronet, in a blind access of feeling which almost made him brutal, 'that is the question.'

'I gave the boy my hand upon it,' said the schoolmaster, calmly; 'Joan is a good daughter that never contradicted me yet. The O'Riordans are like ourselves. She was reared with them. Garret is no worse than Felim; if the one didn't suit her, the other would.'

'He is a sulky, cross-built fellow,' said the gentleman; 'can't you wait awhile?'

'Sulky is it? Och, Sir Philip, you never saw boys better-tempered. And handsome! No son would I wish but Felim was I buying them at the fair.'

An obstinate silence followed. The sun burnt into Philip's brain; he thought the air was parched, and began to moisten his dry lips, imitating the dog's gesture when it feels wretched. 'I must speak to the agent,' he said at length, and Cathal's hopes lost their brilliancy.

'Mr Colegrave, sir? Och, he'll not give a perch of land to a young couple. Often he said the estate should be cleared, but your father—may he never want prayers!—would not allow it. From yourself we will get it, or not at all.'

'The agent shall decide,' answered Philip, evading Cathal's astonished eyes. 'Wait and see—wait and

see. Let the young man clearly understand that I make no promise.'

'God's will be done,' said the schoolmaster, humbly; 'we are in His holy hands—and in yours.'

'Yes, in mine,' thought Philip, ashamed but determined. He was not fighting his equal, and does your gentleman parry a lout's quarter-staff with a battle-axe? Yet, give up Joan? Impossible!

'Have you dangled this bait before O'Riordan? Does your girl know?' he asked.

'I am spaking for the boy,' said Cathal, 'but to your honour alone. Till we get the few furlongs, I wouldn't vex her.'

'Quite right. There is plenty of time; but remember, I promise nothing.' The Baronet, always brief and peremptory, had a terrible way with him. None of his people but knew it. He was mostly silent; and a landlord who neither joked, nor laughed, nor drank heavily, while he hunted and shot with the best of them, left a dark impression, as of one whom it was better not to thwart. This kind of man always has the peasants' good word; if they dislike him, the feeling never passes their lips. Dislike Sir Philip perhaps no one did; but his fear was upon them. O'Dwyer took the Baronet's unwillingness in the way he took all other misfortunes; to resist —but how could he? Unless the landlord gave consent, there was no bridal for Joan.

She, unhappy girl, was knitting, some distance off,

in the shade of a great rock topped with hanging bushes. Her voice, subdued to a dreamy softness, went over the lines of a half-remembered song, but her thoughts had flitted far from their meaning; it was a lover's adieu—old and artless—

> 'For what's allotted, it can't be blotted,
> So farewell, darling, I must away.'

The sound came to Philip's ears sweet and confused, 'like the buzzing of bees on a fine day,' then he caught it more distinctly, and, instead of daunting him, there was something in the words that put this headstrong youth on his mettle. 'Be it so; I will try what is allotted to us both,' he said to himself. And there stood the one man in all the world before Joan O'Dwyer, glowing as a sunbeam. Her lips grew white, her singing fell silent.

How could he bind this fair creature to his will? Alas! she was already bound. As in the fairy tales of all nations it is written, these two had exchanged hearts; he was sure of her without speaking; the air seemed to thrill to his voiceless demand.

A little wheeling and returning, as the plover about its nest, away and to it again; talk that said nothing, but signified everything, not gay, not sad. Before long he was whispering, his eyes fixed on her face cast down, 'You must never marry Felim O'Riordan.'

She looked up now, oh, how wistfully! 'Never; I

know it well,' she answered. 'He is here often; my father is fond of the boy, and a good boy he is. But true for you, I'll never put my hand in his.'

'Why do you look so down when you say that?' he asked, and his breath went and came in sudden throbs. Her eyes were inexpressibly mournful.

'Yerra, who would marry the like of me?' she said, curling her ruddy lip with a mixture of self-contempt and sorrow.

'Who would?' he exclaimed, grasping the hand she drew back, 'I would.' He took the desperate leap. 'As God sees me, I will.'

They were in one another's arms—these children of the woods and the sea, forgetting—how easy to forget—the thunder-cloud which lay far on the world's edge, almost believing that its fire was the light of their love.

An hour swept by.

In token of this fatal covenant, they bound themselves by the strongest oaths never to change; they would not give or take affection; Joan not from Felim, and he from no woman however rich or high. Under this frenzy, which had seized them both, they did as country-folks do, exchanged locks of hair, dark and ruddy, which should never quit them.

'This will be buried with me,' said Joan, kissing the love-lock she had clipped from Philip's bent head.

'And this with me,' was his cry; 'but we will keep the thing to ourselves yet a while. Your father must not know it.'

Joan gave her consent, and so they began to whirl round in the magic dance.

CHAPTER XIX

VARIOUS THREADS

In Irish poetry 'my love,' and 'my secret' are the same word. Charmingly so; but here was one of those secrets known to many that brew death-dealing poison unless they are snatched off the fire. Joan herself went to and fro in a day-dream, not happy, nor looking for happiness; she was within the fairy-hill, and a voice sounded in her ear, 'Touch no food, put from you the bright drink, or you will never go back to your people.' When, in a flash, the girl saw her image up at Renmore — its mistress and Lady Liscarroll—she felt a sharp pain in her side. 'I'd look well in my silks and satins,' was the sarcasm with which she scourged vanity. 'My lady Joan, is it? Good morrow to your ladyship! Now if I whispered it to Nora O'Sullivan, she'd choke laughing. God direct me! I'll surely wither away and die. But I have his hand and word to it, you'll say. I have, indeed, Nora. And I see her giving her head a toss. "There's a hundred twists in a young man's heart," says Nora. What made me listen to him at all?'

Joan could not believe, or even trust; the thing was too great, as if God had promised her the sun. It dazzled her. Philip was there, to be sure, and all day long he talked of love and liking; but when he was gone hope went with him; then she called herself 'a branch that hangs down to the stream, and its blossoms drop into it one by one.' She took the world's part against this unequal match. 'Wouldn't I shame him?'—significantly, not in her own thoughts did she say 'Philip'—'and I'd see the blush on his cheek at every meeting of friends. He has no right to marry except a lady.' Well, could she answer the world?

Philip did not think of marrying yet. This delightful, romantic play out of doors was enough for him. Without knowing it, he was twisting the cord his own way, beginning one of the most dangerous and subtle of the tricks they tell of Munster youths who, with a great air of simplicity, are sly as foxes in love, business and sport. 'Wine is sweet, its price is bitter,' said Cathal, rich in proverbs. What need he be thinking of the price? It is wonderful how the man lingers out his courtship, while the maid looks on to marriage. Here she did not urge the claim, being over-modest, frightened, and even sorry for Philip. Probably, in her heart of hearts, she could not hold the vision to be real. He would be only 'letting on,' after all. Something warned her that she must be on her guard, if she did but know how, against his innocent wiles and stratagems. For these are the very men that swear as many

oaths as they speak words, yet afterwards break them in the sweet face of Heaven, and mean no harm.

But ''tis what they say' that carries good and evil with it. This pretty scene was far from hidden. The O'Sullivans marked it, and though neither would be severe if the girl did as many a one, no worse than Joan O'Dwyer, had done before her, not a suspicion that marriage could be in question crossed their minds. They thought, 'So the master is like other young men, only he fancies we don't see him.' No doubt they said as much in confidence. Had they caught the word which terrified poor Joan, yet served as a plank over this roaring torrent, no tongues would have wagged against her so bitterly. as theirs. But they looked on with singular indifference at a mere love-making.

Not so Felim the fisher lad. As time ran by, and neither the agent spoke nor Sir Philip, he grew desperate, wasted away, lost his lively colours; a great dread fell upon him. The girl, who had never owned him as a sweetheart, repelled his slight attempts to establish some confidence between them. 'She is civil and strange to me—and I her foster-brother,' he thought in his vexation; but unless prepared to take her without a fortune, which he could not do, there was no courting possible. The schoolmaster set his face against it. 'Till we have the farm,' he said, 'my daughter is for no man. I'll not sentence ye both to the pangs of poverty. 'Tis

Mr Colegrave must put in the banns; but strive to pull him towards you, and he'll snap and bite like a dog's head. Patience is the best hound we have in the pack, Felim.'

It seemed likely to be the surviving and only hound. The Lord of Renmore had as good as forgotten O'Riordan; nor did he mention in Mr Colegrave's office his name or Cathal O'Dwyer's. He was in the seventh heaven—let that be what apology it may. But rumour on this side, and the O'Sullivans on that, were getting a fresh act ready; there came to Will Hapgood's ears the most surprising tale—that his friend and favourite boatman had been wanting to marry this bewitching damsel; that her father had consented, but the event hung fire, and, it was lightly whispered, because of Philip Liscarroll. He took Felim unawares, bantered him on his pale cheeks and loss of interest in manly games, and got his version of the story. 'Tis my belief, sir,' concluded O'Riordan, 'that the squire is a very dark man. Joan wouldn't be desaved by him if he didn't promise more than he will perform. He'll talk the world of marrying her, and the smooth word is all she will get. We seen that many a time before, though not from him or his father. I'd be sorry to belie them.'

Master Will's principles were easy-going; and as he cared little about the maid, and less about the Baronet, his interference could not have been

reckoned upon, except in one contingency. Sir Philip was a character; he never behaved like the rest of the world; suppose him, in this tangle, to undo the knot in his peculiar way—quixotically—what would come of it? 'You believe she may be a fool; but that he is sure to be a rogue—is that it, Felim?' he said, slapping his young man on the shoulder. 'He would on no account marry a girl he wronged.'

'Plaise God, she won't be wronged,' answered the other in a tremulous but deeply earnest tone. 'Was Mr Edmund Liscarroll at Renmore, he would prevent it, or I don't know him.'

'What, the cousin would cut in and snap up the prize? Shall we send him news that his chieftain is in love? Eh, old man?'

'You should not joke with them things, sir,' answered O'Riordan, gravely; 'we never thought the two Liscarrolls were great with each other, though living under one roof. The Tanist, as we call him, should be looking some day to get the ould place; 'tisn't likely Sir Philip would take kindly to his own tombstone, as I may say. To be sure, Mr Edmund is in all our good books.'

'And how comes he to be this Joan's protector? Is he that way given? He writes poetry and stuff; I guess he would be the mischief among the lasses. I don't take to the fellow; but he is not so ugly as Sir Phil.'

'Deed then, sir, you'd guess wrong. He has the name of a harmless buachal, with his bits of pomes and blackthorn verses. But when he used to be coming to the ould schoolmaster's, learning his Latin and his Six Books—and the Irish they'd be talking together—not as we talk, but ancient—we could make nayther a fist nor a foot of that same—he'd be coaxing Joan, and she him.'

'And she him, as they always do,' repeated Will, in high delight.

'Well, we were all gorsoons of one age, and if the two of them gave love to one another, what harm in it?' said the boatman.

'Not a haporth of harm,' replied the light-headed Will. 'Thank you, O'Riordan. Now let us turn this point. Land me just below St Brandan's Kitchen.'

They had been wasting the early hours, as Will often did now, under pretence of fishing in the bay of Airgead Ross, where Felim was to wait until the young madcap returned from his expedition on shore. Its object was perfectly well-known to both of them, though never a syllable passed concerning it. 'Don't be down-hearted, man,' said his master, as he sprang on the beach. 'We will rescue your bride, Edmund or no Edmund. She is too dainty a morsel for such a kill-joy as Sir Philip. Leave it to me. Keep a sharp lookout on the doings at O'Dwyer's cottage; but say nothing to the old man. I shall be here again in two hours.'

He was as good as his word, and gay and jubilant he appeared when leaping into the boat once more. 'You have fine news to-day, sir,' said O'Riordan, 'or else you been running, to judge by your colour.'

'Both, my dear Felim,' he cried, giving the other's hand a fierce grip. 'Wish me good luck—yourself too. Now home! Do you remember the night we were all but drowned—when Renmore Castle fell in as we drove under the lee of it?'

'Would I ever lose the thought of it, sir? Often in my drames I do be hearing the big crack it gave, and the lightning over it wakes me.'

'There will be a greater crack yet; but to-day pays for that night.'

'And will Joan be saved when it comes, sir—on whoever it comes?'

'She will. Let me tell you now what share you shall have in the rescue.' He launched out volubly. This young man, whose spirit a year ago would have been pronounced dull, though violent, seemed to have undergone the influence of a loftier mind. He spoke according to his cue, but admirably, though not as one who sees a crystal sky overhead. There were storms coming. The plan which he unfolded as far as he thought it judicious would not have met with the moralist's approbation; but he had learned it from one who scrupled at no means which would compass her object. As for O'Riordan, though but a novice in this world, he

saw that the quality had ways of their own, good or bad, which like the winds and tides were governed by unknown laws. All he wanted was to get his dove (and even if not his) out of the hawk's talons. That Sir Philip could be anything but a hawk to the poor innocent he did not credit. The specimen he judged by the species; in his own Shakespearian language, the squire was 'cat after kind.' Well they knew the kind in those parts.

St Brandan's Kitchen, from which Will had returned in such high spirits, was overgrown now with flowers, purple and red, among its long grasses; sunlight sifted in; butterflies darted like iridescent jewels or snowflakes through the vacant windows; and Lady Liscarroll, with her shining hair, was no less brilliant than they—a gem which had in it the glow of rich blood, of unextinguished passion. While her cavalier told the tale, himself amused, heedless where a spark might fall and sting, she remained immovable, most attentive. 'You put in my hand the thread I was long looking for,' she said when he had finished; 'a jesting matter, you think, Will Hapgood! What a great baby you are!'

Her glove touched his cheek, which burnt suddenly. 'Well, isn't it a game to see your fine Philip stark mad?' he answered, laughing, but not at his ease. 'There's no doubt about the madness. Crazy, if ever man was!'

'Better fight shy of him, then. I know the Liscarroll craze—to my cost. Let me think awhile. You say Edmund had a fancy for this girl.'

'Felim says so. That makes the play up; we can set the whole pack tearing. But I'm not to laugh? How can I help it?'

'You may laugh the wrong side of your mouth, Will. If my son has made up his mind to have Joan—she is a wonderful girl, much more than pretty—angels and saints won't stand in his way.'

'The other gentry might, though,' said he, with a grin. 'Shall we call them up?'

'One thing is clear,' pursued Lady Liscarroll, 'he must not marry her.'

'My sister used to hunt on that trail,' said the young man, 'but we are so devilish poor, and Philip is no better off. Besides, he doesn't throw her a look now. Julia must make a meal of her own heart, poor wench.'

'You know I am determined he shall marry here,' said the lady, indicating Silverwood; 'from this pivot we must work out our plan.'

'Edmund is the favourite; I back him against the field,' said Will.

'Yes, but not against me. Wait, and let me follow this up. Edmund to be disposed of somehow —Philip to come here—Joan O'Dwyer—'

'Felim to get her if he can, Lucifer if he can't. But you are leaving me out, my dear lady.'

'Be quiet,' she said, and smiled. A heavy thought nevertheless clouded her expression. 'After all,' she sighed, 'no one can accuse me of breaking my promise. As long as Joan was under my care, she fell neither into mischief nor danger. She must look to herself. Only a double-dyed idiot would expect marriage from a gentleman.'

'She will go the way her mother went'—Will took up the story now. 'Young Macklin, you remember? Of course there was a difference; Macklin couldn't marry another man's wife.' There his chatter was arrested by the lady's intense paleness and her sudden half-fainting against the chapel-wall. 'Good Heavens, what has come over you?' he cried, endeavouring to support her; but she waved him back, and with a strong effort recovered.

'I always said you were a fool,' she exclaimed sharply; 'how can you talk so to me—to me, Will Hapgood?'

'I humbly beg your pardon,' was the crestfallen reply. 'But let the girl go to blazes—that's all I meant. She is not to spoil your sport.'

'She shall not, depend upon it. At the worst, her fisherman, if he gets a few acres, will be glad to compound, and Joan has plenty of sense—anyhow, Philip is bespoke. That settles it. Now the first step—'

After much musing and beating with her hand upon the broken window-sill, as if she counted the

numbers in some complicated puzzle, the lady resumed. 'First, I am to be unwell. These meetings end for some time.'

With clearness, yet with subtlety, she drew the fine threads of her cobweb out before him, a crossing of lines in which all were to be entangled but themselves. 'Is it not well contrived?' she asked exultingly, when the meshes had been hung up in his sight.

'You are a witch,' answered Hapgood, enthusiastic, but keen on his own purpose. 'If they all behave like saints, caught they are still; and if like sinners, God help them! But,' coming up boldly to where she stood, 'as you hold the threads, I hold you.'

'What mad speech is this?' she said dauntlessly. 'Do you intend to turn informer?'

His eyes were very bright. 'Not unless you compel me. I do intend, though, to have my price, and from you. The day Philip's marriage comes off with Miss O'Connor, I will claim it. You are a free woman, aren't you? Now pledge me your sacred word that you will be my wife when Airgead Ross falls to Renmore.'

'I thought you said Philip was out of his mind,' she answered, mocking him, yet her colour betrayed some emotion. 'What would your mother say? She is about my age.'

'That laugh becomes you well,' said Hapgood, not to be fobbed off in this fashion. 'I know your age, knew it before you spoke. Now choose to

promise me, or have this talk carried in six hours to your son. You see I play him off against my mother. Why did you give me this chain? I have worn it ever since,' pulling out the thin gold links from the breast of his jacket. 'Mad you call me, as if that would put me to the blush! I talk—time flies—speak, or I tell Sir Philip.'

In her countenance a strange terror showed itself. 'There was Walter, then Henry,' she muttered, reflecting on a thousand past scenes, 'now this wild slip of a youth, sprung up across my path when I did not ask for him.' Yet she triumphed in the fascination which brought the lad to her feet even while she could have pitied his folly in challenging the future. His rude touch was endangering the web she had craftily woven—such an obstinate, superfluous passion when it took this form. 'If you are determined not to be generous,' she began.

'Don't expect it of me,' replied Will. 'I am master now; generosity is the last thing I think of.'

'You are a fine exasperating fellow,' she said, still at heart terror-stricken. 'If I must, I must; but we shall live to repent it.'

'Give me your hand, Eleanor,' he said, calling her for the first time by her name. 'God do so and so to me—and more also—if I let this hand loose until my own falls shattered from the wrist. What say you?'

Now they were handfast in the old fatal thraldom.

'I will not let yours drop, yet if you pull it away I shall not hold you guilty,' she said with a faint smile, her spirit sinking.

'Never,' he said. 'And now, Edmund and Philip, my lads, look to your guard. We are going to take you in the rear.'

This interview it was which sent him away like a conqueror; but Lady Liscarroll, who had witnessed battles, knew the day was dawning in a crimson cloud.

CHAPTER XX

IMPERIAL AUGUST

Of one born under a happy star it has been said, 'the very dice obey him,' but Philip was not the man. No sudden alarm startled him into glancing towards the clock, where his chance was running out. Music, the moody food of love, had so deafened him to what people might whisper that every morning he slipped into his secret garden, from which even Lady Liscarroll appeared a figure far off, and almost charmed into quietness. Against him, therefore, the dice, loaded when he looked away, could not choose but fall.

On an afternoon about the end of July came a note, brief and colourless, from Edmund, to say he should be leaving Altamira immediately, and hoped to reach home within the next three days.

'My honeymoon is over,' thought Philip, tearing the paper to shreds. 'How the devil comes it that I can't have my house to myself?'

The cry was instinctive, not grudging; it betrayed a deep wound as well as dread of the surgeon's knife. With Edmund enter 'the world, a hoary cynic,' and

'conscience, a bit of steel in his grasp'—neither backward at cutting through nerve and sinew. Powers of heaven would league with demons from hell to put them asunder. But could they not marry at once? A bold stroke—but a final! Repentance would be out of court then. Yes, but Philip, in the unsteady motions of his brain, saw his wild rose transplanted, withering under the sharp east wind—scorn and sneers, and lonely days killing her; old Cathal shambling not quite sober about Renmore — ridicule sketching the two mothers of them, a scandalous pair — himself stabbed as with icicles. Or could he not marry and take wing?—but that was cowardice. No, he must school Joan, for the present, to play one scene of excellent dissembling; perhaps his cousin, a singer of amorous songs, would come over to their side. Edmund was, no doubt, a nature too abstruse for his comprehension; or perhaps too airy and volatile? In their snatches of argument he seemed hard; if Philip was the hammer, his cousin was the anvil, and bore no marks of the assault.

'If he would stand by me, we two could face the worst. But will he? Doesn't the man keep his poetry for hot-pressed vellum—two hundred and forty sheets to the half ream?'

So he reasoned, not altogether selfishly. The danger pressing close, he might have taken Edmund into his confidence, had not the ivory cubes rattled

in his ears a second time. On the day his cousin was expected, Yegor, the factotum at Airgead Ross, came riding over with a note from his mistress, in terms of singular agitation. Lady Liscarroll was ill, perhaps seriously — would he return with the messenger? His mother felt unable to write. She could not leave her room, and had sent for Dr Driscoll, whose wife would undertake the nursing that might be required.

His heart knocked against his ribs with a sick sorrow; was it bad news or good? Was the long task ending that had been too much for *him*? Would his mother die? What a horrid prayer was that he put up to the dark powers in whose chain he lay fettered? A kind of matricide! He could not think of her in pain of the body without compassion; cruelty was most foreign to his feeling, always had been; but the sight of her in a shroud, he confessed and loathed himself for it, would bring everlasting peace. Let her die without anguish—soon—after he had pardoned her in his father's name. Ay, it was best.

Yegor could tell him little except that the lady seemed to pass from one fainting fit into another. He had left her unconscious. There was no time to look in at O'Dwyer's cottage, or take leave of Joan; she would hear that he was gone to Silverwood; that his mother had sent for him; but perhaps she would have got a like message? Or

no, Mrs Driscoll did not want assistance on Joan's terms. This name, coupled with the doctor's, sounded a death-knell—but to whom? The raven and the screech-owl were flying round that house, called thither by the dying patient. An obscure intimation that the illness had some enigmatic character floated up to his mind's surface, and disappeared. It must have been very sudden. He reproached himself that his visits during the last month were less frequent than he had intended. 'She has no one but me, after all,' he thought, 'and I have neglected her.'

On arriving, he found Dr Driscoll installed, busy and triumphant. The lady's maid was in attendance on the sick-chamber, but could let no one pass.

'I had a right to be called in many months ago,' said the doctor, huskily, breathing out wrath and spirits; 'her ladyship is in a rapid decline.'

'Good God! A decline, doctor? At her time of life, and in this pure air? She appeared in perfect health; I remarked her high colour at our last meeting.'

'When was that, Sir Philip?' inquired Driscoll, rudely; 'a week since? a fortnight? maybe it was a month?'

'Whenever it was,' said Philip, stung to the quick, 'my mother looked the picture of health.' At which the surgeon groaned.

'It was but a picture, my dear sir; a deceptive

blush—the hectic hue of consumption. While imprisoned at Renmore—'

'What is that you say?' cried the Baronet, in a fury; 'measure your language, sir!'

'I say imprisoned,' was the cool retort, 'your mother had little fresh air, no exercise, not a friend about her; you see the consequence. I don't hope for her recovery.'

All else was forgotten in this news. 'She is dying, then?' said her son, with an overpowering sense of grief, almost of remorse. 'I will see her this instant.'

But Driscoll put his hand on the lock. 'I never said she was at the last gasp. Hours, even days, may pass before the critical time is upon Lady Liscarroll. She has her senses, though greatly enfeebled; but she would do well to be left to sleep. What I have to tell you, sir, is that, as a son, you should stay within call, night and day, until we see what turn the sickness will take. It will be a comfort and a vital support to the poor lady; and she begged and prayed me to ask the favour from you. Yes, indeed, favour was her very word.'

'For God's sake, send in to my mother; tell her I will not go away,' cried Philip, agonising. 'Let Mrs Driscoll say so. I can be put up somewhere about the place, I suppose.'

'That Russian spalpeen they call Yegor has a nice snug house—a dale too good for the likes of

him,' answered Driscoll, 'convenient to the mansion. Miss O'Connor is out there now seeing it put to rights for you.'

'But as soon as I can speak to Lady Liscarroll, you will allow me?' said Philip. 'Otherwise, I shall exercise my authority, doctor, and send for my own physician.'

'On my word and honour, you will be the first after myself,' said Driscoll. 'As long as she could she kept it from you, and great was her suffering—the mind more than the body, bad as that was. I never saw a woman so spirited; but now she is down entirely; a feather's weight would finish her.'

Meanwhile, as the master's wheels hurried from Renmore, his cousin's might be heard approaching. The day shone splendidly, for it was imperial August, clad in gold tissue woven of clear sunbeams; and as the poet drove through the land, he thought himself travelling in light, so radiant were the skies, so free from every speck of damp was the air. Happy, therefore, according to the law of winged creatures? Ah, no—this translucent atmosphere hid in its brightness death. For three days Edmund had been moving southwards; he was delayed by an incident most singular and unforeseen at Kilmallock, where he had turned aside to dine in the mansion-house of the Sarsfields with some old acquaintance; and, under such a heaven as he never had beheld, the fire of a yellow

wine poured out to its extreme bounds—he sat behind the horses, too broken for words, stupefied as with laudanum. What did his eyes announce that had such terror in it? This, and this only—imperial August, in cloth of gold, blazing with the summer fires, was—he sickened in its presence—the Famine!

For beneath an enchanted sky, while the winds blew warm, and it seemed that every flower should glow with beauty, every herb yield a sweet savour, up from the fields on both sides came to his nostrils the stench of the blight, a vivid, yet intangible putrescence, that left the air transparent, but loaded the breeze with horror. Mile after mile, behind and before, the plague spread out, revelled in the crops which stood luxuriating amid their leaves, and made the thousands of acres—the dark-green vegetation of a week ago—one mighty marsh. A foul odour of decay, unmistakable, indescribable, as of heaps already rotting. It was not a patch of leprosy here and there, nor a field blasted by the side of one that flourished; the whole world, far as he could see, fast as he could travel, was an infection, sparing, strangely enough, the occasional perch of oats or barley, as these rose and floated on their stalks with the puffs of wind, among the leagues and leagues of potatoes, doomed, like the people that had sown and tended them, to wither away.

The heavy, rich, maleficent breath swept up to

him, as off a battlefield. He had tasted it with loathing the year before; too well he knew it; and, as imagination fled forward, the harbinger of famine, fever, death, in shapes beyond counting, but each of them ghastlier than its fellow, tears ran down his cheeks. That a whole nation should be laid waste, not at the trampling of wars, or in a struggle for some high banner raised over them, but because a miserable, weed-like thing had failed! In the contrast between that smile of the heavens and that stricken earth he felt there was an awful mockery, as at a crime, no less foul than contemptible, now to meet its award in the face of the sun. These were God's tokens of displeasure upon them. He wept and could think nothing but this thought: 'We have broken some law of life, which now stoops to break us. In what have our fathers sinned? And we after them?'

More than once the car in which he drove was stopped by Edmund's desire, and he leaped down to walk among the decaying plants, lush with their unwholesome abundance. Everywhere he scented an open grave. At intervals he stepped close to the crouching forms of women with shawls thrown over their heads, some of them crying with a long, childish lament, the hardly intelligible words making a litany of despair, always the same, always unavailing. Others sat motionless, their eyes fixed on the landscape, as if they saw hunger and disease coming

towards them with quickening strides. These silent mourners were the terror itself; and, as Edmund passed, the looks which they exchanged with him set up a nausea in his mouth, compelling him to spit as if it were poison. To be so resigned!—could human nature fall into a swoon at the mere wind and rumour of calamity, struck by a horrible enchantment? He did not know that it was stealing on him as well; that his own class, haughty and arrogant in earlier days, but brainless, improvident, unused to look things in the face, would succumb to this panic fear, and sink, like the peasant, beneath it. His eyes were already taken; his heart fluttered. When the country still showed its festering heaps, one desire laid hold of him, to rush on and on, until he could get away from the plague, and come to a land where its vile odour would not stifle him.

It was with a deep sigh of relief that he turned into the demesne of Renmore, which as yet seemed free from the blight. Another trouble began to occupy his thoughts, or rather, it insisted on taking the foreground, out of which this new misfortune had chased it. He inquired after Philip at once, and was told that a message from Silverwood, arriving not many hours ago, had called him to Lady Liscarroll, who was suddenly taken ill. 'Thank God!' exclaimed Edmund. The steward gave him an amazed look, but went off in silence, thinking, 'That fellow would ate her without salt, and small blame to him.'

But her nephew was not concerned about the lady just then. Philip's absence gave him the breathing space he wanted. He despatched a line to Airgead Ross, making old Cathal his messenger, with orders to stay the night unless some accident should oblige him to return immediately. 'I shall get to-morrow clear,' he argued. 'When the schoolmaster is away;' he smiled bitterly at the nursery jingle. 'Anyhow, I shall see Joan face to face, and, let her talk what she will with her lips, her looks will not deceive me.'

Pacing the great hall, after his lonely dinner, he tried to map out the situation. In his pocket lay a dirty piece of ill-written paper, how conveyed to him in Galway he could not guess—find out, if possible, he must—the rude, ungrammatical terms of which he knew by heart, having studied them until his head went round. They did not mince matters. Philip was a tempter, if not a villain; the schoolmaster's daughter would soon be hunted out of the parish; it was time Edmund came between her and destruction, if he was ever fond of Joan O'Dwyer. 'What does the thief who wrote it mean by that?' he asked himself. 'Or has some woman her hand in it? But there's no woman about the place except Nora O'Sullivan, and she wouldn't be jealous of poor Joan.' Might it all be a lie? He began to piece together this and that, Philip's ways and the world's way, little things which were either of no consequence or

danger-signals; infinite conjecture, and the detestable anonymous scrawl, firing possibilities like a match. At length he came to a series of conclusions.

'Suppose Philip slandered in this rag of a letter. I speak; naturally he blazes up—the thing admits of no apology—and, for me, good-bye to Renmore. Impossible we should live under one roof when I have flung a tumbler of dirty water in his face. How is that, Edmund Liscarroll?

'But he is not innocent, and I come in to the cue of Old Morality, late and smug, with my sermonising? How then? He wouldn't, couldn't marry a girl out of his own village—daughter of my friend, Cathal! *Should* he? And I recommend him to do it? No, he will never make a clean breast of it to me. The end as before. Edmund, there is your road, follow it.

'I burn the informer's scrap, wink hard, say no more than I did in his mother's case, where I warned him and sat still. The devil drives; we have all taken seats in his car; Joan tumbles out, the wheels go over her, and we wash them at the journey's end. Who will be the assassin? Philip—the driver—or myself? Let me see.'

At this point Edmund was lost in his reflections. The hall grew dark, and still he paced it with slow steps. 'So far as I can judge,' he thought, after a long half-hour, 'I may risk Joan's life—she will surely die if her innocence takes a stain—I have not watched her these ten years to doubt it—or I put my own

happiness — my everything, perhaps—to the hazard. She or I—which is it to be? A charming situation, if I had a poem in hand! But the poetry, this time, will be carved in flesh and blood—acted, not screwed. Were I in love with the creature! What does he, or she, mean by saying I was fond of Joan? I am not; all the same, I will get her away from Sir Phil—and what must be, must be. A night's rest—then my goes the curtain.'

CHAPTER XXI

THE COUSINS

A STEP along the gravel, where it is loosely flung aside by the Lonndubh, and any ear but Joan's might have signalled 'Philip,' as she sat watching. But it was not he—the quick, light tread announced someone more impetuous; in it sounded less of the musing footfall that deep passion loves. She rose up to salute Edmund, whose eye, looking for change in the girl's features, discovered a pale anxiety, a thought overshadowing the brow with its wavy dark hair. Had he not been forewarned, doubtful it is whether he would have seen. The clue is everything.

Like her lover, Joan was saying under her breath, 'The *mi na meala* is past with me,' at sight of this once welcome friend; so truly is love the mother of strife. Her honeymoon came before the wedding-day, as she dreamt, when he began talking with his old kindness, but, as an Irish gentleman knows how to do, in the tone of command habitual to his class. He soon mentioned Philip, and the poor thing winced ever so little; he followed up the stroke adroitly; brought in Lady Liscarroll's illness, of which, by a

passing messenger, some wild and distorted account had reached him in the morning. 'No one would wish her to get well,' he concluded, 'not even you, Joan. When the breath is out of her body my cousin will be free to take a wife, and live happy ever after.'

'He deserves no less,' she answered at random, looking away.

'And who do you think he would marry now? They say he is fond of a gossip with your father—I am the same, myself—and seldom a day passes that he is not coming this way. Maybe you'd hear him let slip the name of some great lady he has in his eye.'

'I don't be listening to them,' said Joan. 'Talk is like the wind that comes and goes.'

'True for you, my girl. But did you never catch up out of it the name—now for a wager would it be anyone not far from us?'—she flashed a strange look at him, and had to keep down a cry—'if it was Miss O'Connor, you couldn't but remark it.'

'If I hear, I don't heed. Sure it was always said yourself, Mr Edmund, would be looking to get Miss O'Connor.'

Now it was the poet's turn to feel hot and cold. 'We won't recite the "wooings" of Edmund, but of Philip,' he answered with a laugh, though not so soon as he could have wished. 'The long and the short of it is, my dear Joan, that Sir Phil is now at Airgead Ross, and Miss O'Connor will be as kind to the son—'

'She will not,' cried the girl, overcome by this skilful torture. 'Why would she lave you for him? My father often said you had only to rise your hand, she would follow you. I could swear to it myself too.'

'But my cousin has a better right,' said he. 'Troth he has, Joan. And if he stays long over there, or his mother was to die in the place, it is my conviction they would make a match of it, unless'—an idea seeming to pluck at his sleeve—'unless he was bound before to some other girl. But that is nonsense entirely.'

'I couldn't tell you, sir,' said Joan, who had been erect all this time, in a whirl of confusion and fear. She had just found these words, but her purse was empty if he demanded more of the kind. 'I'll go in now,' she said feebly.

'Don't hurry yet, my dear child; I have a thing to ask,' the young man barred her escape. 'Is Sir Philip free or not? Tell me that.'

'Why don't you ask himself?' she demanded in turn, fierce as a falcon and with as bright an eye. 'Ask him, if you dar'—not, not me.'

'My intention is to do so when he comes home,' said the other, touched by her growing distress. 'I thought you might know, that is all. But, Joan,' he continued mildly, 'should you be acquainted with a girl—maybe of your own age, I won't say as good-looking—that any gentleman about here is courting

—'tis a way with some of them—do you give her good advice.'

'What advice would I give her?' was the smothered question.

'Say that young men are dangerous beasts, wolves in sheep's clothing, full of soft talk and roguery; tell her not to trust them farther than she can throw them. Will you do that, Joan?'

'Do it yourself; I never will,' she replied, but the heart died within her. 'What kind of speech is this you're putting on me?'

'To that girl I wish luck and happiness,' said Edmund, dropping into the native tongue, 'and she should know it. Let her leave the gentlefolks to themselves, but, above all, the boys of them. When the hounds pull the hare in pieces, wouldn't you pity her, Joan? That is my last word to the girl; and now I hand her to you.'

There was no more to be got by talking with a creature so racked; she would not confide in him; but every syllable bore unsuspecting witness to the letter in his pocket. The hare was fleeing, the hounds in full cry, no musical sound as he walked through the woods of Renmore, his talk being ended.

He looked up after a while, and saw on the fair sands a young fisherman drying his nets by the sea. 'I wonder would Felim be spying on this pretty, tragic business,' he thought. 'My anonymous letter was no distant cast.'

Before long they were seated together, the waves running up within a yard of them, and falling back with a swish most delightful to hear over the white pebbles. They talked a bit, were silent, felt the world above their own troubles to be great and beautiful. But the famine was coming down behind.

'We're in dread it will be worse than last saison, bad as we were pinched,' said Felim; 'if so, half the village will be thrown down and the people beggars on the road. But 'tisn't that is torminting me, sir. I waited here till you done spaking with Joan O'Dwyer.' He would have said more, but Edmund cut in.

'Ah, that is it! Wait a while, Felim. Who taught you to write?'

'I'm not able to write a stroke,' answered the lad, wondering. 'Ould Cathal could never hould me to it, nor Garret nayther. More shame for us! We are as ignorant as a hound of all but getting the bit to ate, and that is going from us.'

'What of Joan then? Is it a match between you?'

'It is not, sir; indeed, I might as well whistle to the curlews or the seagulls and hope to bring them to me, as be sweethearting Joan,' he answered, with the melancholy tenderness of his people, which any disappointment calls up. 'She is the woman that is most for destroying me. But let it go; the man away there at the Castle is more to her than a shoal of Felims. I wanted you to know that.'

Confirmation strong, since he could not write, and looked the image of simple truth! O'Riordan was not slack in unfolding the mixed skein of what he knew and what he fancied—the meetings, the master's distracted yet not unhappy looks, but, above all, his own failure to get, though Cathal had been most eloquent, the promise of a farm. 'He wouldn't give as much as the palm of your hand,' said the boy, bitter and sad. 'Why so, unless he was snapping up Joan for his own supper? He is to have her, and not me; isn't that the commencement of a sorrowful tale, Mr Edmund? I lave it to your honour.'

'The schoolmaster lets his tongue run with all this to the neighbours, I'll go bail,' said Edmund. 'It is the common talk?'

'I frightened him from that,' answered Felim; 'though his mind is no closer than a sieve, he'd fear to lose the cot a second time; but surely, whin the divil puts down his foot, he laves the mark of a hoof —God bless us and save us!'

An ugly hoof it was. That Philip should be tussling with a raw fisher lad about this peasant girl—so the cousin argued, and the poet in him was half disposed to agree—proved the worst his enemies could allege; moreover, what enemies had the Baronet? No—the print was too plain, and everybody saw it.

'You will spake a word for me,' said O'Riordan, softly. 'I didn't tell you this to make bad blood; let me have the bit of mountain itself, and I

would be content with Joan — we'd battle it out together.'

Edmund laid his hand on the boy's arm—it could give a hard blow, he said to himself—and, 'Never blame me, if you don't get your wish,' he answered, 'but Renmore is not mine. Till I have spoken to Sir Philip, let Joan and her father alone; keep away from their cottage; and, should I want a service from you, would you do it?'

'I'd go to the world's end if you beckoned me,' said Felim. 'Will I swear it to you on that book in your hand?'

'Your word is enough,' said Liscarroll; 'be ready at call.' He gave some directions, and on this understanding they separated.

Not that any lines could be set—nor did they need setting—while the master was stretched like a dog at his mother's door, idle but held fast. He had not got inside for several days after Edmund's return; and the suspense, doubled by the strangeness, gave his feelings a wrench that dislocated sentiment, or would have swept it from his heart had it been less powerful. The figure in his secret garden now appeared remote and a little clouded over. Attraction as the square of the distance holds in the spirit-world, no doubt; his unseen mother came close, and because she was, or might be, dying, threw upon love and its light graces a kind of scorn. Philip chafed, grew restive, gave in to the spectral fascination; 'by-and-by' would do for

his courtship, when the black pall had covered this last act. Then—then what? he asked himself with discomfort. Then should the world set eyes on a new Lady Liscarroll?

By Driscoll's report it seemed that the invalid slept most of her time. Once in a way she inquired, as in a half-doze, whether Philip had gone home, begging that he would wait till she spoke to him. At length he was admitted. In a chamber darkened artificially, between white curtains which gave her a look of ashen-grey, and with large draperies about her, the young man saw, but indistinctly, as through a mist, his ailing mother. She made an effort to use her voice and broke down. All she could manage was a sentence or two, interrupted by severe coughing; however, with a smile just perceptible, she hoped he was not worn out, said she was herself on the mending hand; if he desired to see how things were going at Renmore, let him fly there and be back again as soon as he might. Philip had question upon question to ask; but the doctor sat near, measuring the seconds, and after this unsatisfactory interview the Baronet was compelled to retire.

'How do you explain the transparent gleam which I noticed in my mother's eyes?' he said to Driscoll.

'It is a bad sign,' the surgeon replied, shaking his head; 'consumptive patients have it and opium-eaters. However, I don't give her up yet. You may safely take a couple of days.'

He took them, and the first sight he had of the Renmore country showed him acres and acres of the potato steaming under a hot sun, all the tokens of the plague visible. The nearer home he came the more frightful was the devastation; ruin made no choice, every part of the crop yielded the same intolerable stench; and the people were out in crowds like swarming bees—some crying aloud, others praying, more not capable of anything but a stupid, speechless attitude, as of men, dead drunk, lying prone upon the soil. Women called on God with loud cries; terrified children clung to their skirts and, after a pause of consternation, lifted up their voices, thin and clear, lamenting they knew not what. Here was a second shock which threw Philip into a state of discouragement, yet of dumb rage, and pulled his nerves as with red-hot pincers. He pitied and hated himself, his tenants, every soul of man. Life was a horror and a fraud. He loathed it.

'My rents are rotting in the ground,' said he that evening to his cousin, as they sat after dinner at the open window, smoking cigars. 'You'll see no more of your next allowance than you can hold on the tip of your Havannah. We owe the Munster Bank already. Colegrave knows how much, I don't. Sell a few of your rhymes and tags, Eddie, to some publisher. Won't they fetch a few coppers?'

'They are mostly love-songs, and I'm not in love,' replied the other, carelessly. 'The public don't

take to sentiment served up cold. Try you, my lad.'

'What, cold sentiment! Thank you, I shall have enough on my hands with this accursed potato-rot. No time for sentiment, hot or cold.'

'I meant scalding. But you never said a wiser word, Phil. It is sharp notice to the two of us. I must drop my sonneteering, you your love-making. All on account of diseased potatoes! What a subject for the epic poet! Now, if the Dean were alive, here would be his pickle-herring tragedy, which he calls the sorriest of farces.'

Philip, you may be sure, had no ears for this tomfoolery, under cover of which Edmund had levelled his piece, and shot straight.

'You said my love-making. Will you give it a name?' growled the low voice, while Philip leaned forward in his chair, no peony more scarlet.

'Soon done. The first two letters of its name are Joan O'Dwyer,' said his cousin, returning the murderous look.

'It is a damned lie!' the sound startled like thunder inside the room; 'whoever told you that I have—that she—'

'Is it a lie that joins your names together? Tush, I am wasting my breath. Don't be mad with me, Phil. There is just one thing for you to say and me to hear; then I pitch the whole business to Halifax.'

'Well?' inquired the Baronet, still leaning forward, his cigar between his fingers. 'Well,' reiterated Philip, as the other sighed heavily, like those who are mounting a steep ascent.

'Have you made up your mind to marry the girl?'

After that neither of them could speak. They heard the ticking of the clock, the whirr of evening bats with their ghostly cry in the air outside; minutes passed.

'What concern is that of yours?' said the Baronet, slowly.

'Ha! you are fencing,' retorted his cousin, now sure that villainy was on foot. 'Can you not be a man? Speak and shame the devil. I put it as plain as two and two before you. Do you, Sir Philip Liscarroll, etcetera, etcetera, see yourself bringing that girl into this room as Lady of Renmore? No, you don't dare say it. Then what is your meaning?'

'That is my meaning,' cried the young madman, dashing his lighted cigar into Edmund's face. It seemed to strike out sparks from his cousin's eyes, as they sprang to their feet and confronted one another. In an instant they were grappling, suffocated. 'Let me go, or I will strangle you,' muttered Philip, his great hands on the other's throat. They were unequally matched, and Edmund fell back, panting; his head would have struck the floor had not his wild assailant caught him.

'I'll teach you to interfere,' said Philip, as he released him. The poet made no answer at first; he was collecting himself for a strong effort, not to try conclusions with his hands, but to act on the whole situation. In a singularly strained accent he said, after some internal conflict, 'I want your promise that you will marry Joan O'Dwyer or let her alone.'

'And I will break your neck if you say another word about it,' cried Philip. Had Joan herself, there and then, begged him on her knees to answer, he would not have done it.

There was a burning on Edmund's cheek, where the cigar had struck, just below the left eye. It smarted and made him blink. He appeared to be considering deeply. 'Poor girl, poor girl,' he said at last, 'I did hope to save you. Now it is over. Lost, both of us—no chance for either.' Then he laughed excitedly, and, turning to Philip, continued. 'If we were nothing to each other this would end —you know how.'

'As you please, and where you please,' answered the Baronet; 'suit yourself.'

'I will—don't fear. But I shall not send you a challenge,' replied his cousin.

Philip walked off to the window, and gazed out on the flushed evening.

'I leave Renmore; whatever happens to you, I have done with it. Good-bye, Philip,' said the other.

'We were at no time very thick; but I could have helped anyone who was not a fool.'

'Go,' answered the Baronet.

He heard Edmund's retreating steps and in not many minutes saw him, cloaked and hatted, pass out from the hall door and disappear in the woods.

CHAPTER XXII

BY THE LONNDUBH

BETWEEN that and midnight, the steward came three or four times, on divers pretences, into the room, but always found his master smoking and immovable at the window, not to be disturbed by questions. The late moon waned into a white sheet, and still he sat there. Dawn unclosed its purple eyelids; he was mute, wakeful, deep in thought. His naked spirit shivered in its loneliness. When he looked to one side, as if seeking counsel, his eyes rested on Sir Walter's grave. In the other direction, unseen but felt, was Joan O'Dwyer's cottage. A strange, inarticulate dialogue seemed to pass in the air between them, warning him how he ventured to match himself with one he might lose or leave —his father's doom over again. But the sweetness of love tasted was also on his lips. That made the soul faint within him.

He would act before the morrow ended. Mr Colegrave was to be in his office at ten—an appointment which could not now be put off—that dealt with, he must go down to the schoolmaster's. Had

he caught a decisive word in the night's colloquy between Love and Death, Philip might have hurled the estate and the agent into the bottomless pit, or, with a terrific pang, cut through the wizard's knot which bound him. The case was too hard. Meditation showed it in a thousand varying shades of guilt or misery. A few hours would, perhaps, clear the sand, reveal the crystal. Though he had struck Edmund that horrid, indefensible blow—as in cooler moments he was not unwilling to grant—he knew his cousin, and trusted in his honour.

The man whom he had insulted was not far off. While one of these cousins sat staring at the moon, the other was wandering in the sea-kirtled woods of that ancient house, or had thrown himself drowsily on great heaps of dry heather, close to the waves, and was arguing this debatable cause. His first plan had been dashed against a blind reef; 'but I may still rouse the sense of danger; and that other move is left,' he reflected, meaning he knew what.

Shame and weariness overcame him towards the early hours; he slept, to wake with a start under the broad, warm day, resolved not to violate the finest demands of his own punctilious temper, yet hoping the end would reward him. 'In token that I am honest, I give up my tanistry,' was his half-smiling thought as he sprang from the heather. 'I give up,' he continued, biting his pale lips, and with a sigh, 'Lisaveta—if it was not done before.

Pretty well for an effeminate amorist, who has endured what I did last night, never striking back. And I would have struck—had he not looked so wretched, poor devil! Now he calls me coward, no doubt.'

Walking with a certain carefulness, Edmund turned up the side of the Lonndubh, refreshing his eyesight with its morning splendours of light under the thick branches. He came upon Joan as she moved towards her little cottage from the spring where she had drawn a pitcher of water. So early an encounter boded no good; she set down her burden, paused near a tall oak, now in all its glory of russet and green, and waited until he should open the dialogue.

'I have seen Philip,' were his first words, in a tone so friendly that she looked at him with astonishment. 'Ah, you wonder how I got this mark,' he went on, touching his cheek lightly and colouring; 'it is *your* mark, Joan—set on me by my cousin as soon as I mentioned your name.'

'You'll break the heart in me,' she cried, trembling all over. 'What call had you to come between us? Oh, sir, is it the way with love and affection to ruin us all?'

'It is, Joan, dear,' replied the poet; 'you should have known that same when you gave love to the master. For myself, I am leaving Renmore from this out.'

'On account of me?' she inquired, her breast heaving.

'On your account alone, my child. It is right I should tell you so.'

'But I wouldn't marry the best man that trod on shoe leather till he let you back into your own home,' she said, 'and I ask you to forgive me.'

'Did he ever promise to make you Lady Liscarroll?' began Edmund, but he broke off suddenly. 'Don't answer me—what signifies Philip's promise, good or bad. It is yourself must say the word.'

'Long ago I was telling my own mind what you are telling me now,' she answered proudly. 'The thing that is a hundred times too good for me is not good enough for the like of him. My heaven would be his hell.'

'Joan, I have news for you,' said he, with great gentleness; she looked and listened as to a doom or an oracle. 'When I was in the County Galway, someone you should think of now rose up before me.'

'Oh, you have seen my mother,' cried the poor girl, running to him. 'She is not dead yet. Thanks be to God! But surely sick, or sore, or sorry. Did she ask was my father living? You told her I do be praying for her night and morning?'

''Twas this way, my child. Mr Staunton has a great estate—Altamira it is called—and in the stoniest parts of it do be living the squatters he won't turn off.

to the workhouse—they are so miserable outside it, what would they be inside?'

'God bless him for that,' said Joan.

'Well, he used to be showing me those squatters and the cabins they put over their heads—low bits of sheelings you must stoop to go into, the naked stones on one another, as a child would make a house of them. And on the doorstep of the worst there I caught a woman looking hard at me; and I seemed to have a sketch of her face. Indeed I had, Joan; and my eye is on it now,' he said, regarding her pitifully, 'but when Mr Staunton spoke my name, what did she do but let a screech out of her you'd hear across Galway Bay, and fall dead at my feet?'

'Oh, Mother of God, and was she dead entirely?' cried Joan, her hands lifted in the suppliant attitude of Irish despair.

'God did not give her the grace to die,' he answered, 'yet who knows? Perhaps she lives to fulfil a good purpose that no other could. I'll not tear your heart with a long story. Macklin is dead this many a day; 'twas he played the mischief here—we will forget that; and she is a lone woman, withered, grey and broken, ashamed to be seen.'

'Let her come back to us—had we but a meal of stirabout we will share it with her. Oh, let her come back to her own,' said the girl, and fell voiceless from sheer emotion.

'Listen to me, and you will know if I did right.

That was the very word I put upon her. "Go back, Sheila," said I, "to the place you came from. Your poor old man will take you in; and Joan—" I needn't say what my talk was of Joan. The few shillings to pay her way she would not take, however.'

'And you left her among the stones of Galway?' asked the girl, with a strong sense of rebuke hardly kept down.

Edmund smiled. 'That is your reckoning of me, is it? Now, my girl, whatever happens after this, believe I couldn't do more for you if you were my own sister.'

'That I'll never be,' she murmured, adding in her heart, 'Nor any man's wife.'

'I persuaded your mother to leave that place and come home. She gave me her oath upon it. "But," said she, "for my penance and my poverty I'll walk every step of the road." She took a start that same day, by herself, barefoot, carrying her poor little duds in a parcel on her back.'

'But isn't it a miracle her not to be here by this? How long would she be going the road?' inquired her daughter, anxiously.

'Here's the second chapter of my tale,' answered Edmund; 'I had my own reasons for turning home two or three days after Sheila going. At Kilmallock I was to take dinner with the Quinns—old friends of our family—and there's a holy well—'tis but a cupful of water—on the roadside, before you turn into the

main street. At that spot your mother was seated, footsore and half-killed with her travelling. She could not raise a limb from the ground—was it a stroke of the Almighty, or the great misery she had gone through? I am not able to tell you. But her journey came to an end at the holy well.'

'I am sure you never left her in that state; your heart would be in your mouth seeing a woman so wasted.'

'It was, Joan. But by that time I had news which when we first met was unknown to me—news concerning yourself. My friend Quinn is a doctor; I explained the case to him, and your mother I left under his charge at Kilmallock, where you—'

She would not let him finish. 'Where I will go to her—I and my father—we will lave this place—see how God does everything for the best! Is not the man above wiser than all of us?' said Joan, with tears, not unhappy.

'My knowledge of you was not less than my confidence,' replied Edmund. 'When will you turn your face to the road? And—could I lend your father what would pay the car driver?'

'You could not, sir;' she waved a decisive hand, her eyes bright with the tender drops. 'They must never have it to say we were paid to lave Renmore. I have what will clear some part of the road, the rest we will take as my mother did.'

'Sir Philip will be hurrying after you,' said the

young man, 'if he gets the least hint. Can you start without delay?'

Her breath stopped. The air seemed to quiver with passion, as the waves beneath an intense sunshine. It was impossible that Edmund should say one word more, and he stood passive in this moment of their fate, when the scales swung to and fro undecided.

'I have no right to run from him and no talk between us,' she said convulsively.

'Your mother,' whispered Edmund, 'your mother, Joan!'

'Was she the best of mothers, he has my hand and word; I can, I must, go back from them; but I'll do it to his face.'

'With bare hands you will pluck your heart out of the burning coals? He is a devil to have his own way; are you able for him? I can see you tremble from here.'

'Through fire and hell itself I will go to have my heart again,' she said, flushing up; 'if I am wake, I am honest. He shall be told I am taking the road to my mother, but not where she is. Thin he won't say it is putting a lie on him I was.'

'You will go to-morrow, if you stay this day,' insisted Edmund.

'We will go after seeing him. That's the bond is upon me.'

Edmund came up and took her hand. 'God be with you, Joan. I have done. I will let the Quinns know you are coming. If you want to get away

easily, put your trust in Felim O'Riordan, and don't see Sir Philip. Shall we meet again? God knows. I have made up my mind to go to England; it is far from Renmore. You *will* risk yourself with the master?'

'If you wint—and I wint—on the one day, every tongue of the neighbours would have the same story,' she said, with a child's innocent malice. 'But you scorn to be thinking what they'd say.'

'My thought is that when you hear Philip's whisper, like the breeze in the branches over our heads, you will despise the whole world too. Rather than that I would carry you myself to Kilmallock.'

Her hands were clenched with fierce determination across her breast. 'One word is as good as a thousand,' she said. 'If the blow kills me, I must let him strike it here. May the angels of God pick every stone from before your feet as you go, Mr Edmund, and may the ocean be a soft pillow to your head! Was it not for you I would be still in the dark. Whether I live or die, I'll never forget that.'

He turned, and while she stood as if to watch him, but full of her own great distracting thoughts, his bent figure was absorbed into the waving woods, sucked down into her life's past. 'When I set eyes on him again, I'll be a widow,' she said to herself, repeatedly, 'a widow that was never a wife. 'Tis my pity and my portion.' The sweet Celtic laments, with their pretty words of moan, sounded within her,

softly and sadly, like the women beginning to keen at a burial. '*Is truagh!*' and '*mo bhron!*' echoed the refrain, heartrending, untranslatable. Already she listened for the steps of tempest rushing down from the Castle.

And in the sultry languor of afternoon Philip was at her door. The wise, hard agent had kept him, grinding sparks out of a millstone, with reports of gales not paid, nor likely to be paid at Martinmas next, of mortgages demanding their interest, of loans from the Bank which must be renewed at higher terms, all the deadly symptoms, in short, that, breaking out over encumbered estates like a disease, prophesied of woes more formidable. Above all, the Famine was throwing itself on these broad acres. Would Sir Philip join with other gentlemen in a strong resolution at the forthcoming sessions—he was, of course, on the Grand Jury—which might strike and stir public opinion in England? This, that and the other—a man with the plague in all his limbs making his will! At last he flung away, ran out into the open, and directed his steps towards the cottage. Edmund was nowhere to be seen; he had apparently stuck to his word and absconded. But had he spoken? and with what result?

Yes, yes, a single glance told him; Joan was another woman. 'You have been talking with Edmund,' he said, astonished at the exceeding beauty of her paleness, the luminous depths of her purple-grey eyes, and touched almost to fainting when he

saw her tremble. 'But don't believe him,' pursued the ardent lover, his hand stretched to seize hers and convey a thrilling assurance from his heart. 'Never a word, my beloved. Why do you draw away from me? I must not touch you? But why?'

They were outside in the thick whispering reeds, at that time half asleep, and the Lonndubh stretched glassy and still along their path. Not that they walked as in the old days, dreamily sauntering; their steps were few and they came back upon them, so overweighted with passion that their limbs refused very soon to move. Joan wanted to be out of her father's view, and avoided the open spaces where he might have caught sight of them from the cabin door.

'Give me time, Sir Philip,' she said humbly; in that word he felt a cloud all about him.

'Don't think me changed,' he was urging; 'last night Edmund drove me crazy. I am not different. What did he say of me?'

'He said it was no matter what you said,' she answered—this was the surgeon opening his case of instruments—'but that is not it—help me now a little—no, don't look at me that way—' she fixed her own eyes resolutely on the ground. 'You gave me a promise one time,' she continued, then her breath failed.

'Did he say I wouldn't keep it?' asked Philip, in accents as shattered as her own. She shook her head and moved down towards the stream.

'Lave Mr Edmund out of it,' was the reply; 'he

wouldn't ask me was there a binding word between us. Indeed, I thought you out of your mind to give it, and here it is for you again.'

She turned and was holding out the ruddy curl, tied with silk, which in their hour of ecstasy she had cut from his temples. Philip snatched it with violence and flung it into the idle water, where it loitered, was blown about, drifted this way and that, until a sudden gust sent it floating seaward.

'But I don't give back mine!' he exclaimed, and a red rain of tears, as he thought, fell from his burning eyes. 'Will you break your oath, Joan? What was it we swore? That cousin—God confound him!—so angered me, I would not answer his insolent questions. Now you punish me with whips of steel. But I mean to marry you; I never meant anything else.'

'If I took an oath, I will take another to equal it,' she said, always as if the next sentence must break her in pieces. 'I gave you back the lock of hair. Oh, 'tis gone from me!' and that cry of a sick child brought him to her heart, but she ran to escape him, wildly, as though her leap would be into the river. 'I'll die before it is done,' she whispered, 'but it must be done. You have your promise again; let me have my oath—we will never— Did I tell you my father and myself should be laving this place to-morrow?'

'Come, I won't harm you,' said Philip, seeing her desperate, his love at odds with a horrible sense of freedom. Joan was the most beautiful of God's

creatures now, struggling towards some great height, some nobleness that rayed out splendour as she faced it. Oh, lose this soul of his soul, this unparalleled, before whom he was smitten with light,—not for all he ever had, or should forfeit!

'I hold you to your promise,' he broke out, and then tried to be calm. 'Why leave me and this place, you foolish child? It is your home; I am your husband.' That pleading in his voice, which melted them both, was very dangerous. For a moment the girl stood vanquished. But her eyes followed the floating curl, as it was borne out to sea; and even so slight a thing done gave her support.

'Relaise me,' she said quietly, 'from my bonds. When that curl left me, my heart went with it. Philip, from this out, I am a dead woman to you.'

In his bloodshot, brilliant eyes you might have read the madness of love and murder, such a mixed passion as fills the streets of populous cities with the cry of tragedy hawked as evening news. Murder, hiding them both under its dusky wings—the Love-Raven, black as midnight, a blot on the sultry August weather—a breathless flame which, in another moment, would spurt its venom. Joan felt the dark bird flapping noiseless pinions; she sank as it hovered.

'Oh, for God's sake,' she gasped in pity and terror, 'Philip, take your eyes from me! I didn't think to hurt you so bad. Whist, dear, I said the heart was out of me, and 'tis true; you have it always. I found

my mother at last—my mother that strayed away, Philip, dear—'tis to her we are going. Ah, dear God above, what a stroke to the man you gave me!'

With fire, as in the Arabian tale, she had fought fire, though it should make ashes of herself. The Love-Raven drooped, split with a dart tempered at the forge of hell; it tumbled, clearing the sky in its descent, and Philip was a mere man again. No apparition could be half so dreadful as this haggard, ludicrous mother, 'that strayed away,' and was now bleating after her lamb in some frowsy thicket. At this supreme of moments, his hopes all broken glass, splinters from which the naked foot recoils, he laughed—a loud, blaspheming laugh, that smote the heavens as with a fist and railed upon the gods.

'I forgot you had a mother, Joan,' he said drily; 'that alters the case. Fine things, mothers—aren't they? But we can't get loose from them till they die, and how long some of them are about it? Tough—yes—immortal; is it fresh air and travelling that keeps them up? Birds pitch their young out of the nest; mothers—yours and mine—leave the nest to bring up the birds, but they always fly back, don't they?' His voice changed without warning. 'Oh, my girl, I think I shall go mad.'

For the last time their arms were round each other's necks, and they had forgotten oaths and counter-oaths in a clinging embrace. 'Will you

go from me, mavourneen?' he whispered. Her tears ran softly.

'I would die, if 'twas any good to you,' she said, breathing the words into his bosom; 'but I am not fit to live with you. Now let me take the one farewell in this world. Beyond it there is nothing but blackness and death.'

'You never loved me,' he said, releasing her with a wild cry.

She stood still, in the very attitude of that marble Deirdre, her hands lifted appealingly. 'As God is my Judge, you were the one desire of my heart, and ever will be,' she answered, in tones that had all the music of her singing. 'Did I think worse of myself than of you—oh, man, aren't you nine times sweeter to me than the honey on my lips, and more to me than father and mother? but 'tis when the soul in me cries out for you, hungry and thirsty, that I swear to God I won't disgrace you with a thing like this. There's the lock of hair you gave me away with the strame and out to the ocean; but as far as it goes, 'twill be a piece of yourself. Oh, Philip, I am that lock of hair; and if you never see me the second time, don't say I was strange to you.'

At those words Joan fled into the cottage and barred it against him. He dared not beat on the door. But as he passed, she heard a dreadful sobbing; then the woods and the stream held their peace, and a great silence fell.

Four-and-twenty hours later Philip went down to the cabin once more. It stood open. He entered and saw bare walls, a cold hearth; the nest was empty. Loud in the thatch the swallows twittered; a wild rose hung down, straggling across the small window, and it showed crimson against the sun. Creatures of the wood had drawn closer, even in that brief space, encouraged by the absence of human footsteps. A torn leaf of some Greek author lay trampled in the moist clay, where the schoolmaster had let it fall.

She was gone—the free, brave spirit could not be held in, even by pity for himself. A greater pity had driven her out; and Philip, with such despair as when Antony fell on his sword, never asked to which point of the compass she was fleeing. The tragic end carried off stage and all. From the treasure of love that yesterday was his, unhappy! nothing did he keep but a ringlet of blue-black hair. He felt that, like the forsaken home, he was cold and dark.

'These mothers, these mothers,' he said to himself, in no melting mood. 'Why can we not burn away the nerve that thrills when they call? I must go and see mine now. She will ask me about—' He could not name her; could he bear that anyone should touch that string? From the cabin he strode into the copse, walked for miles along the lonely beach, mounted the hills and gaped for air when the vision of the sea broke on him below their furrowed crests.

The August night would not lose its insufferable brightness; but Renmore Castle appeared to him as an unquiet grave; he shrank from going home. An old saying of the schoolmaster's would not leave him: 'Bad is the night, and many a one like it will ye feel from this out.' When sunrise filled the clouds with colour, and the sky had become a burning jewel above his head, Philip was standing at the gates of Airgead Ross.

CHAPTER XXIII

STRICKEN

MARCH had come, and the hungry months, in a procession of grey-vestured hags, each more grim and gaunt than she that went before, were climbing up the steep of heaven, which sometimes threw over them a gleam of mocking sunshine, and afterwards drenched them in rain for days together. The monstrous Famine lay stretched out full length from sea to sea. He had taken the land in his grasp. To Lisaveta, watching in her tower at Silverwood, a more frightful dream—yet real as horror could make it—was ever present. She saw the nation on a raft, far out in the Atlantic; and of the miserable food it had snatched from the wreck, three-fourths were washed overboard in a wild tornado; the days might be counted when what was left should fail, after which the castaways must eat up one another. 'Death is the only god that gets no gifts,' she thought, calling to mind a verse from some Greek poet that was often on Edmund's lips, when they prophesied of the coming evil. 'Why does he get none but because he takes

all?' she argued, ending with a sigh. 'Where is Edmund now? And Joan, the ill-starred child? Together—then they are wretched; or apart—she had better be in her grave.'

Seven months, and no tidings had reached them of the O'Dwyers, concerning whom a legend was already growing. Why had they flitted suddenly within not many hours of the younger Liscarroll's disappearance? O'Sullivan, the steward, invented, or set others upon sketching, a little fancy piece, which might have been placarded on walls as 'The Two Gentlemen of Renmore,' but in it Sir Philip played the honourable part. The event showed Joan's perverse taste, and sealed her doom. 'But would the old schoolmaster go along with her?' it was objected. 'Cathal is a poor *crathachán*,' said the steward; 'you would entice him to the jaws of hell with the smell of whisky. Often I heard his boast: "I scorn to have sinse whin I'm drinking." Let who will find the drop, O'Dwyer will let the *cailin* go to him. However, mark this, my man; I am not paid to tell on Mr Edmund, whatever he done, and I'll thank you to lave me aside from your gossip.'

In this shape, but with uncertain outlines, the story floated round Miss O'Connor. She could not question Philip closely, or at all, after his dishevelled reappearance at her gates on that August morning. Yet they had been constantly

together since, and a legend was binding them also as man and wife to be, when the hunger should slacken and life run in its pleasant channels again. No wonder. What could be the meaning of Lady Liscarroll's long stay at Airgead Ross, if not her son's marriage with the great heiress? Once the cry went on Edmund; but he was flown to foreign parts, and Sir Philip had made almost a home for himself of Yegor's cottage; surely with intention.

His mother's illness kept him there, you will say. It was lingering, painful and mysterious. The doctor still named it a decline, but gentle, as of sleep stealing on imperceptibly. 'She can't recover,' he told Philip in so many words; 'it is like fine old lace wasting into a mould, thin as a spider's web,' said he, 'and I believe the Grey Tower did it. Don't attempt to take her back with you. If the people saw her ladyship, they'd say she was not there at all, but some fairy woman from Rathmorna.'

'I got my hurt at Rathmorna,' said the Baronet, gloomily smiling, 'and the same night my mother came to me. So that is how they talk, Driscoll?'

'Foolishly, indeed,' said the surgeon, 'but they would be for putting her on the fire to bring home the rale Lady Liscarroll. She is safe here, and here she should be left.'

Some conversation followed between the young

man and Miss O'Connor. 'I make Yegor's cottage over to you freehold,' she said with her serious smile. 'Your mother shall not be moved. She has won my heart. No, not a syllable on that subject. You and I, Philip, are friends; there can be no question of money between us.'

'But you have lost other friends. They don't call since—'

'Let them stay at home then. I have made your mother less unhappy; isn't that enough? The ways of county families are nothing to me; I leave my character in their hands—better fling that to the wolves than oneself. Such is my Russian code of honour, Philip.'

'It is like you,' he could not help saying; and his sincerity, unconquerable sadness giving it so deep a tone, made them intimate without lessening the reserve which had always hung about him. Lisaveta would have talked of his cousin; she thought so, at least, in spite of a warning shiver, but there was no way into the black marble tomb where his secret lay unsunned. Moreover, the invalid had dropped a caution in time.

'Philip is the unluckiest of men,' said Lady Liscarroll, with pauses of faintness to punctuate her admonitions. 'I can't be sure what is the real state of things. It would be cruel to ask him; but his cousin has quitted Renmore—Joan, my innocent maid, is not there either. One distrusts young men

that write love-songs and young women that sing them. So inflammable—is not safe, is it? Promise me you will refrain from inquiries.'

'I will not trouble Philip, certainly,' answered the girl. 'His cousin—' she stopped, and was glad in the dim chamber not to be seen blushing. 'I have had a letter from Edmund.'

'Really,' murmured the sick woman, 'has he the face to write? In what terms? Humbly or defiantly? He begs your forgiveness?'

'No; it is rather a formal note—I could wish it otherwise — dated London; and he sends me the papers I wanted, about those Stauntons—how they manage their property, you know. But in a couple of words he concludes by saying that he has left Ireland for a long while, and he bids me good-bye.'

'I call that underhand,' said Lady Liscarroll; 'depend upon it there is a rat behind the arras. To go in a hurry—then the vague address, London—no farewell even to you, my dear, generous girl! Why, it is unpardonable!'

'I wish we could get news of Joan,' answered the tender-hearted Lisaveta; 'but no one seems to have been on the road when she went. At least, so Yegor tells me. To push inquiries would set more tongues in motion—perhaps do harm.'

'My son, I can feel, is desperately hurt. Fancy it, an elopement, a moonlight flitting—anything bad you please—from within his gates, as if he had decoyed

the girl and the old man, to let Master Edmund work his wicked will! Spare him the allusion. I am only thankful it did not come to pass while Joan was attending on me.'

'You say, then, she has gone with—with your nephew?'

The lady replied in a feeble tone, 'I say nothing, for I know nothing, but appearances are black against him.'

They were, and would be, whatever followed, unless the Baronet should explain. But if he had been of a seldom-speaking nature in times past, he was the image of silence now. The land itself had fallen under a kind of amazement; stupor was in all eyes; and Philip seemed less peculiar than in the bright old chatty season when a people that delight in talk, and can talk admirably, had captivated tourists with their humorous eccentricities, their lambent wit, their inexhaustible fun and not unkindly satire. A stillness that might be felt settled down over Ireland. Fiddling and dancing stopped dead; there was no sound of the old fairy music from rath or hillside; sports fell extinct among the myriads who looked, in a fever-dream of despair, upon the fields which had turned to plague-spots. Rooted in their sorrow to the soil, what could they do but shroud their heads at last and die speechless? The silence of the castaways on their raft—a world of waters around them!

At such a time, the customary bonds were loosened;

in so huge an eclipse, what mattered social convention? There was leisure—too much, where every minute should have been precious—but no temptation to blame the Russian girl, in whose house a young man, single and marriageable, had become a daily inmate. Lady Liscarroll ceased to be a theme of indignation or surprise. Will Hapgood might now ride openly—every other day, if he chose—to Silverwood; his cronies had something else to think of than the fiend which sat on his crupper.

Yet they did not think to any purpose. Nor did their more sapient elders. The Famine, which starved a million of the governed, proved in letters of blood and shame—in cottages that were burnt over the corpses within them by way of funeral-pyre; in pits choked with the dead; in a miasma of sickness spreading until the very air was diseased with it—that the governing classes did not know how to govern. Shall we say that the Famine created this anarchy? no, but everywhere it brought anarchy to the face of day—such a day as men call the Last Judgment. That judgment had now fallen upon the Irish peasant, a slave during centuries, and on the Irish gentleman, who held his land by the tenure of making life possible to his serfs and dependants.

Behold, he had made it impossible—even for himself!

In the same room where Miss O'Connor had talked with Edmund and her agent of the coming disaster, she was seated again, on this wild March morning.

Mr Nagle, his maps outspread, was marking the fields and farms on which the death-rate had mounted highest. Sir Philip, at the window, listened or looked out, and sometimes threw a word over his shoulder.

'We can do no more,' said the agent; 'relief-works are in progress; the people get soup once a day by your orders—'

'If they are able to fetch or send for it,' said Lisaveta. 'How about the others that can't stir?'

'Well, we want an army of relieving-officers,' said Mr Nagle. 'I don't know where they are to come from. It is a new idea that giving money leaves the distress as great as ever.'

'But it is true,' she said. 'People can't eat shillings and sixpences. There should be a regular military service, as in a besieged city. And oh, Mr Nagle, how few soldiers of charity we have! There's Glenmasson—five or six hundred people dying, and only the couple of clergymen and a single doctor to see they get nourishment.'

'Renmore is as bad,' flung in Philip; 'it is my own place, but I can do next to nothing. Every other house has someone in it at the last gasp. Have you a dead cart here to go round and collect the corpses they find on the street every morning? We hired one in our village—not before it was time. It never comes back empty.'

'The people die off like sheep,' said Mr Nagle.

'They die like angels,' answered Lisaveta. 'Did you

ever see patience so beautiful? When they can hardly speak from hunger, still they say "God is good." And not one of them will steal the food he wants so sorely—they go down into the deep, praying.'

'I saw ten doors shut fast in Glenmasson yesterday,' observed the agent, in a subdued voice. 'The families within had all died since our last meeting here. Three of those cottages would have to be burnt, and the bodies within them; coffins could not be had, nor was the place safe from infection.'

'Yes, I know. They were telling me this morning that Darby Fitzmaurice, the big wrestler—you remember him, Philip, last May Day—was dead with the hunger, and his wife and her sister.'

'When I was driving hither from the Castle yesterday,' said Philip, 'I could count at least twenty heaps of ashes that were cabins, and inside them—faugh! what is the use of talking? The country is one great burying-place.'

'And yet we hear no keen raised by the women; the friends and relations don't follow as they used, when a funeral is seen on the road,' observed Mr Nagle. 'I had to call strangers to help me, not five days ago, after getting poor Tom Bresnahan into the coffin itself.'

'Worse than that. Did you hear of the dogs in St Colman's Churchyard, and the thing Frank Hurley took out of their mouths?' said the lady, pale-faced.

'No wonder, if we can't dig the pits deep enough

to hold thousands,' replied her adviser. 'But we're like an army struck with the plague. Every person is down with it.'

'Those men you see trying to make roads—God save the mark!' exclaimed Philip, 'they have no strength left in them. Yet they must work before the soup is ladled out; and they struggle against one another like famished lepers.'

'But the children—have you noticed that the children no longer play in the street? Not a sound of their voices,' cried Lisaveta; 'something has clean swept them away.'

'They are lying huddled on top of one another by the smokeless hearth and in dark corners, we know that,' returned Philip. 'Ay, thousands of them.'

'Yet we gentlefolks, rent-receivers, set over them to guide and guard, if necessary, to feed this people, are impotent as painted idols,' she said, with uncontrollable emotion.

The agent answered her. 'My dear lady, it is the English landlord refuses to abolish the Corn Laws; our Irish estates are mortgaged up to the hilt. Let us not blame ourselves too harshly. You are doing all in your power; so is Sir Philip.'

'Perhaps,' she replied with a sigh; 'to my thought we are drones, suddenly commissioned to make honey for the working-bees. The hive is crammed with their dead bodies. Don't let us boast. Tried and found wanting. Write that on our gravestone.'

'Well, we pay for it,' said Philip, turning round, so as to exhibit a wasted countenance and eyes deep sunken beneath their sockets. 'I am not the only one by scores. But I may tell you, Miss O'Connor, and you, Mr Nagle, as an old friend of our house, that the mortgages on my property have been bought up by some unknown person, who threatens to foreclose within six months. I shall not be able to settle with him; and I see the end. Our family will part from Renmore, which they have held since the time of Richard I.'

Lisaveta cried out, and would have clasped the hand that Philip withdrew. The agent, who was not less moved, said, with an attempt at calmness, 'Your unknown person is no mystery, or I have a couple of blind eyes. He is our old acquaintance, Davy Roche.'

'Who will evict me, as he did Cathal O'Dwyer,' exclaimed the Baronet, laughing unpleasantly. 'The fortune of war! But now, Miss Lisaveta, you understand that I can take no share in your plans of relief, and why, if I am an idol, Roche is the idol-breaker; he means to pull me down. The estate is entailed on my cousin,' he continued with embarrassment, 'but Edmund has—' he stopped. 'That will make no difference in the end.'

'Is Lady Liscarroll aware that you are threatened?' said Miss O'Connor, looking at the wan-faced young man with an unquiet glance.

'I have told her,' said he, turning to the window again.

'Ah,' said the lady, under her breath; and she fell into a deep study, across which a smile darted. 'We will break off now, I think,' was the conclusion of her musings. 'But you should have told me first, Philip,' she added, in the full rich tones that made her sympathy a balm to wounded spirits. 'I don't agree in Mr Roche taking Renmore estate to himself. He is not wanted there, and the Liscarrolls are.'

'We have had notice to quit,' replied he; 'unless we could find a crock of gold at Rathmorna, out we go at Michaelmas. We shall not find one.'

'Who knows? Who knows?' she answered soothingly. The agent marvelled that his young friend did not speak on this broad hint; but as if a demon held him speechless, Philip declined to unlock his lips, and Mr Nagle was angered. 'The man's blood has turned to water,' he thought.

Was it so? Lisaveta, her face shining, appeared to have caught up a sudden light, which dazzled, yet did not displease her.

Walking on the edge of her exquisite fairy-water, over dry golden weeds, by-and-by, she pieced the matter out. And a long skein it seemed, with many twists and tangles. For nearly twelve months Lady Liscarroll had been her guest. A charming guest, though half the time an invalid, and only now convalescent. That charm was not in the woman alone,

with her bright talk and airy reminiscences of a world so much more brilliant than the neighbourhood of Airgead Ross. Unknown to Lisaveta, this doubtful situation kept alive in her the sentiment of living for another, without which she would have condemned herself as eating an idle bread. She longed after romance, but of a profound, a tragic colour; and the sting of martyrdom awoke within her some strange melody, like a chant of austere joy.

Lady Liscarroll was not faultless; the girl knew it, but she felt drawn to serve those who would try her, even to the utmost; and what that woman of the world set down as an effect of her own witcheries was due to an instinct, not rare, though difficult to account for, that dedicates itself to pain lest it be overcome by the glamour of life. This young girl, with her beauty, wealth and health, her equable temper and warm heart, would have summed up her views in the wise man's dictum: 'He that looks on existence as aught save an illusion which in course of time breaks its own spell, is always its fool.' She did not put faith in the things which she saw; she was on her guard not to be taken in by them. Perhaps the French expression would best interpret Lisaveta: *Elle avait le besoin de souffrir.* But religion came to the support of her temperament, and this singularly unmodern feeling appeared in the girl's meditations to be a virtue.

Thus, if Lady Liscarroll played on the nerves of

her hostess with fingers designing mischief, she awoke other chords than she knew, inaudible to her dainty yet unspiritual ear. They might seem to make Lisaveta the merest slave, since all she asked was to suffer. But this kind of victim has secret forces and a depth of character, for which no worldliness in the long run will be a match. That her guest was scheming she did not imagine until some odd and scattered tokens fixed themselves on her attention. So long an illness, without lapse or recovery, was a strange thing. The Driscolls hardly improved on acquaintance. And Yegor's keen little Tartar eyes, which were everywhere, had seen as in cat's light a phantom outside the house resembling Lady Liscarroll, when the afflicted woman was shut up in her chamber. Had this disquieting news any background? Even so, Lisaveta was loth to act upon it. She needed only the sight of Sir Philip's overcast features to kindle her enthusiasm for self-sacrifice; a grief which he could not master was consuming his youth; what would be the added burden if his mother went back to Renmore?

Then Miss O'Connor was in love with the red-haired Firbolg of Cathal's description? 'I love him,' she thought, smiling gravely, as her eyes took in the glory of the afternoon, spread out on the sea, 'and I am sorry for him; perhaps I could marry him; but the love they talk of is something else. Why did he blurt out in that abrupt fashion, before Mr Nagle, the

story of his mortgages?—his death-wounds, I might call them. It was a warning, and a defiance. Very noble, all the same. Now had Lady Liscarroll been weaving her fine nets about him, as I feel their threads when I attempt to move? I know what she would like? Does Philip?'

Her innocence, though flawless, could not be the schoolgirl's unripe fancy. Lisaveta was well up in the language of women; she caught, and sometimes practised, its half-tones; the shade, the innuendo of an accent, rarely escaped her; and when Philip's mother associated her son and lifelong gratitude in the same breath, it was much as if she handed to her friend a declaration signed with his name.

Of mortgages, foreclosures, money, she had never spoken; perhaps she was ignorant, but he said she knew; her sentiment, then, rang hard and metallic; but, after all, Renmore cleared of its encumbrances would be a great estate, especially if Airgead Ross were thrown in. 'No, I do not blame Eleanor'—they had long reached the stage of Christian-naming each other—'it is right she should drive the best bargain for her son—she has hurt him enough;—and is it—I mean would it be—a bad one for the bride?'

Not if she loved—that other way—with a pulse that made one music in two hearts. 'I wish I knew what had come to Edmund!' she said, and the words were scarcely thought when she coloured violently.

The transparent water, Venus's looking-glass, over which she bent down, seemed to blush; it was her eyes that created a vision of fire. 'But he has not written; he is cold and stern; or something—someone—keeps him silent. Did he take poor Joan away? "You can't trust these ballad-singers," said Eleanor. Can you?'

The voice to which Lisaveta had always given ear —with its eternal refrain, 'Thou shalt not please thyself'—had gained strength from pride, and it insisted now, 'Why not Philip? It is a made match, in the public rumour; Edmund foresaw it; this morning's announcement was a declaration—not Valentine's, with pretty speeches on one knee, but Orson's, in a bearskin. Honest, supremely frank, and fair. He is unhappy, poor and valiant; who is there to be fond of the lad? What better could a woman do than comfort him?'

A faint vanishing echo of hours once heavenly seemed to flash out 'Edmund' from a dark corner, and Lisaveta shook. 'I might be sorry,' she answered out loud. The sudden hint terrified her. For a minute or two she stood, watching the clouds at sundown—a high mountain-meadow, sprinkled with pansies, yellow, violet, creamy-golden—and the sad sea-music repeated some formidable word which she strove in vain to understand. No, not wholly in vain!

'I could give myself, were that all, she said at

last; 'our friends here think it is done already. But I must be clear. In that disappearance of Edmund and Joan—so unlike them both—there is a riddle to be seen through; till I know the answer, I am not a free woman. To my own feeling I am not. How did I let the child slip into darkness? Seven months! Our troubles all came together; the spirit died within us. And their secret has been kept, as secrets are in Ireland—that is the chain of silence we fine people can never break. Well, I mean to break it. Let me think how.'

In the same falling twilight, his mother was rebuking Sir Philip, where they sat in her room. 'You should have proposed first, and explained afterwards, you silly boy,' she murmured languidly, yet in an undertone of decision; 'if Lisaveta consents, what signifies the mortgage? It will be paid off.'

'I explained, because I shall not propose,' replied he; 'don't let it worry you, mother. You say I am bound. I don't see it.' He was gentle with her, and worn out.

'In honour, in gratitude,' she answered eagerly; 'if you spoke French, I could tell it you in a word.'

'Say it in English. You want us to marry because Mrs Hapgood chatters.'

It was a random shot, aimed at nothing in particular; but the curtains shivered about Lady Liscarroll. 'In French, people—Mrs Hapgood, if you like—would say the dear child's reputation was—compromised.'

'By me?'

'By you and me. By the situation—by all that has taken place. Philip, you really should try to see it with the eyes of the world. You are bound to make the offer; then, if she declines, we have done our duty. Too shy, my dear? Give me leave, and I will speak for you. The way is paved.'

'I can't,' he said with a groan. 'Why did we come to this house?'

'All my fault,' was the contrite answer, in a voice he never could resist.

'Three days—I must have three days' reprieve,' said Philip, struggling; 'you don't guess what you are doing to a man. Compromised, you call it. Ruined, I call it. No, you shall not speak a word to her. I will put the cord round my neck with these hands.'

CHAPTER XXIV

AFTER MANY DAYS

No condemned man thinks the time long between sentence and execution. Philip's reprieve had run out; he was fixing the rope and taking his last free look at the world, conscious of the trapdoor underneath, which would suddenly give way. 'I shall speak this morning,' he thought, and felt glad it was pouring rain, as he walked up from his hermit's lodge to the front terrace of Silverwood. He was a wreck drifting with the tide, on what iron coast? 'Well, she can have me,' said his cheerless meditation. 'I have told her no lies. But it's hard on the girl; why didn't I foresee that?'

Rain in the woods, veiling the hills in grey, soaking the spirit too, until it felt limp and downcast—hopeless rain; but when Philip came up to the entrance he beheld a carriage and pair, Lisaveta's coachman on the box, and the lady herself, cloaked against the weather, giving directions.

'Driving on a day like this?' he ejaculated; 'surely not far.' His eyes lightened; the rope about his neck fell into a looser coil.

She answered him steadily. 'You afraid of rain,

Sir Philip? No? Neither am I. A journey—I can't say when I return. In a week or less.'

'My mother will miss you.' He could not bring himself to say anything else.

'Take good care of her; the place is at your disposal,' she replied, as he helped her into the carriage. 'I have left a note to explain.'

Her silence on the purpose or destination which called her out in this atrocious weather made it impossible to ask questions. They shook hands; Jack Dennehy flourished his whip; the horses went away at a smart trot.

Philip leaped down from the scaffold, and flung the hangman's rope to Lucifer. 'I will not do it,' he said to himself again and again. 'What an escape! Now I mean to take a day off at Renmore. Back on Wednesday.'

Calling for Miss O'Connor's Russian servant, he announced his intention, and inquired if Lady Liscarroll could see him before he went. In a few minutes Yegor brought him a pencilled note. His mother was going on well; let him get a change of scene—three or four days at home.

'Tell her ladyship I will be here on Saturday,' he said, and so left it.

Before noon he was marching on Renmore strand, the ruins of the Grey Tower on the rock above him, Joan's deserted cottage almost within sight. And ah, the bitterness of it all!

He had made no attempt at pumping Yegor; that hydraulic process would never yield a draught. Doubtless the Calmuck knew on what business Lisaveta was travelling; he ruled the house, held his tongue, and was impenetrable. A word from Yegor at this moment would have astonished Sir Philip. Still more, could he have overheard the little conversation between Miss O'Connor and her bodyguard two days previously.

'If your Excellence will tell me whether you are to marry this Irish gentleman,' Yegor had said to his mistress, 'I shall know my duty. Everyone says so, except you, Lisaveta Carlovna, and I am bewildered.'

He was studying her serious eyes. 'Yegor,' she answered, not flinching, 'it may turn out as everybody says. But until I have found Joan O'Dwyer, dead or alive, I cannot decide.'

'She must be found?' asked the man, 'must, you say, Excellence? And how if the other gentleman, Mr Edmund, had run away with her?'

'Even then, I have to be sure of it,' said Lisaveta, putting a hand to her side.

He reflected. 'I thought, as you were going to take Sir Philip, the best thing was to let this girl drop out of the dance. There is one man who may know where she went—her lover, Felim, the fisher lad. I will go down to Renmore and see what can be discovered.'

He took his own means with Felim that night—made him drunk, and got all the lad knew, which was not a great deal. Next day he informed Miss O'Connor, 'The old Cathal and his daughter said they were going to a place named Kilmallock. Whether they did, O'Riordan knows no more than the man that is dead. But he says Joan never told a lie in her life.'

'I will go to Kilmallock, then,' answered his mistress. 'Get everything ready. I start in the morning.'

She was now on the road alone, separated after many months from Lady Liscarroll, with a sense of deliverance and a growing clearness of mind, which boded ill for the Renmore marriage. Edmund's figure revived; his gay and tender musings aloud, his touches of poetry lighting up the dull everyday, pleaded for him in undertones. Would a nature so passionate and chivalrous belie itself, delude an old comrade like the schoolmaster, and entrap a harmless child? Men, indeed, were strange beasts, 'but he is not proved guilty yet,' she concluded.

The journey lay through scenes of desolation unspeakable. Blinding rain; but men like skeletons at work on the high roads; and wherever the carriage stopped, women gathered round it, clamouring, with children half dead in their arms. When the rain cleared, a sickly sunshine fell upon the cabins; hundreds of them were half thrown down, or burnt,

and long rows of others silent as the grave, their doors shut, no sound from within; but Lisaveta well knew that their inmates were starving in blank despair. It seemed as though she were driving between the beds of an immense hospital. Sick children she saw wherever a cottage door was open, but on those miles and miles of road none were playing about. Long before the day was done, she had given away all her free money; nothing but the severest resolution held her from scattering the rest among these miserable crowds. 'I have to find Joan,' she murmured, 'it is my vow; too much time has been lost already.' But her eyes and heart were full.

On the second day a bright, rather chill, weather made the roads less tedious; she was moving over the gentle green slopes of a land even then devoted to pasture, and the people appeared to be less miserable; but at every half mile a funeral met her, or was visible across the meadows, and the silence appalled with its suggestions of universal famine. Her carriage was drawing near Kilmallock. She could see the fine old ruins of church and castle a little beyond the town, their delicate tracery and lofty walls showing against a sky of great purity, blue and cold. All at once her voice startled the driver. He turned on his seat and perceived that Lisaveta was standing up, pale and tremulous. 'Stop, stop,' she cried, 'no further! Oh! I have seen him!'

Jack Dennehy pulled up, while the lady sank, almost fainting, on her cushions. What had she seen to give her that fright? He looked. 'God sind I may live!' he cried, blessing himself, 'if 'tis not ould O'Dwyer breaking stones on the road! Wisha, wisha! did you ever hear tell of the like of that? And he the finest scholar in Munster! Oh, God help us!'

Miss O'Connor 'made but two leps of it,' said Jack afterwards, and was holding Cathal's wrists, in a bewilderment of joy and grief. 'Oh, you wicked man, why didn't you write to me?' she cried; 'you dreadful— But where is Joan? Take me to Joan at once.'

There came no answer—a warm tear fell on the schoolmaster's hand; he wiped it shyly away.

'Merciful Father, she is not dead!' exclaimed the girl; 'don't tell me that bright, loving creature is dead. Cathal, won't you speak to me?'

A number of the gaunt shadows had come round them, leaving their work, if work it could be called; they were bloodless and faint, as beings from the dim under-world, so starved that they showed only a slight curiosity, while everyone of them held out a bony hand for alms.

'Speak, my dear O'Dwyer,' she insisted; 'don't leave me in this agony. What has become of Joan? You know me; surely you have not forgotten Airgead Ross?'

At that he pulled himself together, staggered to a

heap of stones by the roadside, and sat down on it, wiping his forehead.

'I'm ashamed to be seen by one that knows me,' he said, his face downwards. 'This year and last we had Beg's bad world—'twas a prognosis of these very times that ancient wizard made to King Diarmuid at Tara—men in bonds, women free,' with a glint of his old satirical manner, looking up at her, but subdued immediately; 'winds many, wet summer, green corn; lean cattle, scant milk; the poor burdensome in every place; you may say, indeed, a world withered.'

'But Joan—let me hear about Joan. Why did you hide yourselves from us?'

'It was my girl's desire. She would not permit me to address your ladyship. "We gave the back of our hand to Renmore," she said always. Kilmallock is a poor place, ma'am. All the Latin and Greek you ever put your tongue to wouldn't buy a piggin of buttermilk. 'Tis that sent me breaking stones; and look now at my hands. How could I form a letter with those welts on my fingers?'

'You could not, poor man,' she answered, 'how indeed? But where can I meet Joan?'

'We came hither,' he said, following his own reflections, heedless that he was torturing her, 'to find Sheila—a woman I married to my own discomfiture—no credit to us at all. We found her without searching, like the stitch in your side. The wakeness took

her limbs from under her, and now she is as grey as a badger, and her good looks gone. Indeed, I wouldn't be surprised was she to die on us. I forgive her what she did. He's in Erebus that did it—or lower, maybe. Well, we must all die.'

'Joan is nursing her inside there,' said one of the bystanders, pointing to a hovel down the road; 'you won't get a sinsible word from him, my lady. He is like that half the time, and the other half he is crying; but the tears, I think, come aisy to all of us, we're as wake as kittens. Would you have a penny about you, my lady, you could spare a poor boy?'

'A rose noble, a mark, or an angel?' Cathal took him up. 'An angel, above all? How much was it? I forget entirely. 'Tis long since we have seen or felt those coins. Soup is what we get when our pile of stones is broke small; but sometimes I think hot water with grase in it would give more nourishment.'

'Leave the stone-breaking, and show me into your little place,' said Miss O'Connor; 'every minute is an hour till I see Joan.'

'*Fugit irreparabile tempus*—how often I made the boys construe that—and we hear and don't heed till the agent is at the door,' answered Cathal, putting on his tattered blue coat. 'Joan, my dear madam, is not as well as I could like; she has food enough, would she ate it, but she does be always giving it from her. Unless my eyes desave me, she has a poor colour, and little flesh on her bones. I'm not strong myself.'

His step was so uncertain that Lisaveta made him get into the carriage, and took her place beside him.

'What had you to eat this day?' she asked.

'It is not ateing but drinking I'd call it,' he said, with the flicker of a smile; 'we have the soup, as thin as it can be made; it houlds out longer that way. Ateing is gone out of fashion with us; our digestive apparatus would not be able for it.'

The cabin was sunk several feet below the road, and its damp thatch garlanded with long green weeds made it like a bee-hive to look at.

'Mother and daughter, mother and daughter,' said Cathal, as he got down; 'you may enter without knocking, ma'am; they won't hear you.'

So it seemed, for when Lisaveta stood in the gloom, almost touching her, Joan gave no sign of life. She was seated on a chair without a back, beside a press-bed, on which lay a moaning but not restless figure.

'Don't you know me, dear?' said her visitor; 'you can't see me in this light. But my voice—my voice is not strange to you, Joan?'

Putting out her arms, she took the girl tenderly and lifted her up. Joan gave a low cry, such as you might hear from some wounded creature in the brush, not loud or piercing, but pitiful exceedingly. And then she let herself be caught to Miss O'Connor's bosom.

They were silent, except for the sound of tears, a long while.

'Give your mother a drink,' said Cathal, quietly. 'She is thirsting for it.'

'I will give it; do you sit down, Joan,' said the young lady, taking the coarse white mug and putting it to the patient's lips as well as she could in that position. A pair of intense grey eyes, blazing with fever, unclosed, and seemed to inquire who it was. Lights under snow-white hair, in a transparent, still handsome face, which had long been drained of its vitality. She must once have walked in all the pride of strength and comeliness—it was Joan rapt into old age, the ghost of herself, not utterly undone, though death's hand lay upon her.

'How long have you been nursing here? Ah, but, Joan,' her friend broke out, 'it was cruel to run from us—why did you?'

With an effort, clearing some painful mist from her eyes, the girl, in a singularly thin voice, managed to say, 'Are you all by yourself, travelling?'

'All by myself,' replied Lisaveta; 'I thought you would like it better. No one knows. Trust me. Oh, you can. There are some questions—should you feel strong enough to take a drive with me?'

'I couldn't be far from mother,' she said. '*He* is always asleep if I lave her to him; and the neighbours have their own sick.'

'Well, the coachman shall take your father a drive. Come, Mr O'Dwyer,' shaking him gently, 'if Dennehy—you know Dennehy—has the money, will

you show him where to buy food and drink? And will you bring the doctor back with you?'

'Dr Quinn, is it?' answered Cathal. 'He has, at the lowest computation, two thousand five hundred patients; and he knows no more of healing-herbs than the child died yesterday. Potions, pills and drugs is what he lives by; I wish I could say as much of his sick—the poor *gommels!* However, I will do your bidding. Tell me, before I go, has Joan the fine blush on her she used to have when every boy in Renmore—'

'Joan will be herself soon—never fear,' said Lisaveta, hastily, 'but do you go without delay.'

Leading him out, she gave Dennehy his orders, saw Cathal on the box by his side, and came back into the stifling cottage.

'May we sit with the door open?' she asked. 'The air is close.'

'It makes her cough,' answered the girl. 'I sit here and I do be drowsy. We can open it once in a while.'

'How thin you are!' said Miss O'Connor, kneeling and putting an affectionate arm about the frail creature. 'Is it true you give away the food you should be taking?'

'We are not so badly provided as most,' she said. 'When I came here, seven months ago, I had my strength, and I could earn. Dr Quinn was like an angel guardian to us—till I found where the

money came from. Then, indeed, we could not take it.'

'Whose money was it, Joan?' Believe me, I am not asking from idle curiosity. The happiness of more than one depends on your answer.'

'I would be the last to make mischief; won't I soon be gone out of this myself?' she said. Her eyes smiled even in that gloom. 'And surely he meant neither hurt nor harm to us.'

'Who meant no harm? Who was it sent money you refused?'

'I never thought but his heart was to yourself, Miss O'Connor,' she returned. 'What else would it be? Don't trust a word from their lips if they say different. Many's the tale is told, and never a true one.'

'He, and he, and he! Can't you put a name on the man?' said her friend, more and more agitated. 'Let us stand in the light where I may see your face, dear.'

She drew the girl across that mean threshold, and a flood of dazzling white radiance fell upon her threadbare gown and her features above it, framed in dark ringlets. Lisaveta repressed a cry. The beauty she had known was still there, but ghastly, spectral, subdued to a paleness of death—as if an outline sketched on thin paper, just purple where the lips should be. A fixed languor weighed upon the eyelids. Joan seemed unable to stand.

'Oh, you are dying like the rest—oh, dying!' was her friend's word, and they clung together.

'Please God!' answered the girl, not much moved.

An exclamation reached them from within. 'I'm here, mother,' replied Joan. 'What is it?'

They turned in again. The figure on the press-bed muttered something inarticulate, and drank eagerly of the water Joan held down to her. 'Draming, draming,' said the woman in her sleep. 'Cathal, would you strike your wife—would you?'

'I must stay here,' said Joan, faintly, 'but why should you, Miss O'Connor? 'Tis plain now that the three of us won't be troubling the neighbours long. Go, in God's name; the sickness is taking.'

'Without you, Joan, I will never go. They must come with us, of course. What do I care if the sickness is catching?'

'I'd think worse of you, did you take harm, than of all the world,' cried the poor girl; 'no, indeed, we could not return to Renmore. Lave us to God, and yourself go out of this.'

'Cruel — you are, dear — unkind to me,' said Lisaveta, with tears in her voice. 'My own sister, let us bare our hearts to each other,' she continued in Irish, 'I know our troubles are the same. Tell me who made you leave the place.'

'If I put the blame on Mr Edmund Liscarroll, would you think I was shaping lies?'

'You were always the truth itself,' answered the

lady, breathing fast; 'he got you to run away then —and he sent you money afterwards? Don't mind me, it is nothing—I want air.' She threw the door open, and was going out, when the other caught hold of her dress.

'No, no, you haven't half the story! Mother of God, will I be always in this grief and my heart split? I do blame Mr Edmund; he ran a knife into my breast. But you—I see you never got a true word from that coaxer, with all his songs and speeches.'

'He was in love with you,' said Miss O'Connor, steadying herself to bear the blow which was coming at last.

'With me?' Joan laughed incredulously. 'They say women are looking-glasses, and every lover's face is seen in their eyes, shining bright. You will not find Mr Edmund in mine.'

'Then how? Then why? You are tying the wizard's knot about me, Joan; do you call to mind last May, when your father bound us all in one coil? But what brought Edmund into your story?'

Joan pointed to the sleeping woman. 'He met my mother, and gave us the news. I persuaded my father to let bygones be bygones, to come and do the best we could for her.'

'Well, but do you think he did wrong in telling you? Was that all? Joan, you are hiding some secret from me. How can I get you to trust me?

I will keep nothing back myself—no, not the deepest fold in my heart. Where shall I begin? Shall I say that Lady Liscarroll wants me to take Sir Philip?'

The pale white mask flushed crimson in her sight; Joan held to the press-bed, which shook violently. It was impossible for the other to continue her narrative, and she stopped, certain confused lights struggling within her.

'Did he ask you himself?' inquired Joan, a bitter taste in her mouth.

'Not up till now. He appears to have lost all courage; that makes me feel for him. But if he does—my dear, I could not say it except to you—convince me that—that the other is unworthy—'

'You would take Philip?' interrupted the girl.

'I would; not because I am fond of him; I can't explain all that; nor does it matter. See now, Joan, you must be sincere—open as the day—I have been so to you.'

At this moment a quavering voice came from the bed. 'Lies—God forgive me—I tould Cathal many a one. What good was it to me? My dear girl, spit it out, and God will be thankful to you.'

So unearthly was the admonition, as from inside a sepulchral vault, that they exchanged looks of amazement. 'She is right,' whispered Lisaveta, 'I must know all.'

'Much or little, I will let it go from me,' said

Joan, her mind made up. 'If you will take the man you gave love to, 'tis Edmund Liscarroll. He never did a thing you need be ashamed to hear.'

'And Philip?' insisted the other, striving in a dim and cloudy dawn to catch the true outlines of a landscape now unrolled at her feet.

'I gave him back his promise,' said the girl, weeping; 'he would not give me mine. But he is free.'

As though clouds and stars had vanished together and all the heavens were pearly white, the revelation came. 'Oh, you wonder!' cried her friend; 'you gave back Philip's promise? Here you have fled to escape him? But do you know that this is to die a hundred deaths for his sake?'

'He could never take a poor *oinseach* like me up to his castle; Mr Edmund burnt that into me. 'Twas foolishness in the two of us. I returned the lock of hair, and he threw it upon the running water. Maybe he did well.' She could say no more then.

'Your heart is bleeding ever since,' was Lisaveta's comment, to which no reply came. But old Sheila was dreaming aloud, and her broken sentences mingled the names of Cathal and the man Macklin with whom she strayed from her duty. 'Macklin — Macklin,' repeated the ghostly voice, 'I have no right to him, nor he to me. There's a poor sowl we are tearing between us. The red dogs couldn't do more to it.'

Her daughter, overpowered by all she had gone through in the last hour, sat leaning against the mud wall, Lisaveta's arms round her.

'Was I the stone image of the girl they thought like me, in your house,' she said after several minutes, 'I wouldn't be suffering; but under the sod I'll have peace. I have spun every thread of it now for you. Take it, and don't be hard to Mr Edmund.'

'We have lost him, I fear; it is not known where he is gone,' replied Miss O'Connor, despondently; but, plucking up a spirit, she added, 'Your courage puts me to the blush. I see my way now. As for Philip—yes, he ought to make you his wife. He ought, Joan. He shall. I take you and yours with me to Airgead Ross. We will start as soon as your mother can be removed. No murmuring; it is right you should go back, under my protection. Who can hurt you, silly child? This has made us sisters. Not? We two poor things with our lost lovers,' she ended, attempting gaiety; 'I say we are a pair of widows, and we will keep house together. I hear the carriage; your father has come back.'

Cathal was at the door, a little brighter than he went, with packages too heavy for his trembling hands. Dennehy would have helped to carry them in; but that was Miss O'Connor's share, bringing a crowd off the highway as soon as they caught sight of this large relief. She had to steel her

heart against the poor shadows. 'There is a woman dying within,' she said, and they dispersed silently. O'Dwyer had brought a message from the doctor's wife. Mr Quinn was miles away, distributing food and medicine to his innumerable sick; but would the lady put up at Sarsfield House while staying in Kilmallock? It seemed the wisest thing to do.

'Yes, I will drive there,' she answered, pressing his cold hand. 'We have been chattering like magpies, Cathal, while you were out, and to-morrow, or the day after, if Dr Quinn allows, I take you all with me to Airgead Ross.

'God be with my shovel and pick-axe, then!' he cried, looking hard at her. 'You are in airnest, I hope. I could wield a ferule with any scholar, from Quintilian down, but at breaking stones I'm no prodigy. My daughter will revive in her native air. But what is come to her now?' he concluded, aghast, for Joan had fallen in a faint across her mother's bed.

CHAPTER XXV

WIDOW AND WIFE

At Silverwood no one had the least guess why Miss O'Connor was gone, nor how long she would be away. Even Yegor did not know. 'Perhaps a week or ten days. My orders were to tell Lady Liscarroll at least a week;' such was the message he sent in by Dr Driscoll to the invalid. Sir Philip was always at his Castle; and on the Thursday a note reached him in his mother's handwriting, to the effect that she felt much better, though still feeble, and she hoped he would enjoy and prolong the change of air he was taking. In the lines of this epistle no stranger would have detected a tremulous pen; they ran evenly; the letters were formed with as much rapidity as elegance.

'She has an undaunted spirit,' observed her son, laying it down; 'after an illness which would have finished any other woman, her pulse must be less irregular than mine.'

Enjoyment for this vexed and tempest-driven soul his mother could not have expected, if her studies had been as close of all that regarded his temper as

during the far past days when they sat in the High Room, captives of one great crime. But all she saw was the near success of plans she had obstinately cherished; and Philip was the unlikeliest of mortals to wear his heart upon his sleeve. Miss O'Connor's departure seemed to him life from the dead. In imagination he was always lying on the grave of his murdered love—weeping the inward tears that distil from the soul—when he thought how Joan had cut with a single stroke the ties that bound them. 'I might search high and low till we stood face to face, yet she would still want this braid of hair from me,' he thought, clutching it fiercely. 'I should have to kill what is best in her; otherwise, I get no consent to our marriage. Would I win her at the cost?'

Tragic arguments these, leading him away from the one he chose out of all women to Lisaveta's feet. He laughed when this troubadour's phrase flitted across his fancy. 'I'm not quite the man to strike an attitude,' he thought; and then, 'In fairness, should I not make her the judge whether I am free? Tell her what we were to each other, and how it ended—there, down by the reeds and rushes of the Lonndubh? Have I any business to be keeping this?'—the wisp of dark hair was still twined about his fingers. He concluded impetuously, 'She ought to know.'

This seemed a way out, for they would both be

acting in daylight; and his mind was at length made up, though not until he had ridden leagues and leagues, sorry that he could get no chance of breaking his neck over a fence. In his country the hunting season had come to an abrupt close. Masters of hounds were unable to keep their packs; the gentlemen had mostly sold their hunters and did not know how to feed their stable-boys. It was the last stroke. So Philip had his riding to himself.

He was the most solitary of mortals. Since Lady Liscarroll's illness, the Castle deserted by its master had fallen into a dismal silence; no visitor came up the avenue where the grass invaded and mosses grew thick, and the young men who used to meet Philip in the hunting field went their ways, forgetful of a comrade they had never understood. Was it his fault? He would soon pay for it.

He had just reached the conclusion of so much debating when Mr Colegrave wrote to him from Cork, telling him that his efforts to raise money and save the foreclosure of the mortgage had some prospect of success, but 'We shall do little unless you can see the principals yourself,' he added; 'could not you give us a few days here, even at the risk of leaving Lady Liscarroll?'

The young man smiled — not pleasantly — and answered that he would come. At Silverwood his intended expedition was speedily known—messages passing continually backwards and forwards between

the houses—but he warned his mother that disagreeable business, such as this, which he did not expect to turn out well, was always slow; he could not name a day for his next visit.

Slow enough the business proved. Every interview ripped up fresh wounds in the body of the estate, which was loaded with old charges, with tenants on the edge of bankruptcy, and the disorder of years. Mr Colegrave tried hard to make up for his own methods, at once severe and neglectful, of managing the land; but it was too late. Several days passed in bitter and unavailing discussion with the cautious bankers to whom, in this extremity, he had applied; the upshot was that they declined to advance any sum which would satisfy the unknown mortgagee. Philip never mentioned Miss O'Connor. When his agent hazarded the name, he said merely, 'If you were acting on her side, could you advise so bad a bargain?'

'There might be a way to mend it,' answered Colegrave, not choosing to meet Sir Philip's eye. 'Wealthy ladies can indulge their tastes; it is a property with—with romantic associations, and would give splendour to any woman.'

The Baronet turned away, thinking, 'We are certainly man and wife to this fool of a public. She never supposed that, when she opened her doors to my mother; nor did I.'

All this parleying ended in smoke, except for the

tongue of fire that leaped out from it, the marriage inevitable, brought about by accident; and the burning scar sent Philip home again. 'She shall be told everything; then let her say the word,' he resolved, as he left behind him the bright streams and hanging gardens of the fair city. After a night at Renmore he felt the time had gone by for trifling. He would ride at once to Airgead Ross, get tidings of Lisaveta's movements, and put himself into direct communication with her, if she were still away. But, most likely, she would be at home. Twelve days had elapsed since her departure; it was now the third Monday in March.

And a beautiful day, glittering like a gold ring which had been dropped into the lap of winter by the advancing year, rich in tone, windless and dewy, kind to the spirit and the sense. Philip started in good time, with such a tumultuous heart as the man who hears the rifles sing; but he recovered somewhat under the physical excitement of air and motion. When he arrived at the house and asked for Miss O'Connor, the Russian informed him that she had not yet returned.

'Then I will go up to Lady Liscarroll,' he said; 'please let her know I am here,' and he made a step towards the stairs.

Yegor hesitated; a certain embarrassment came over him; he muttered something in his native language, the import of which naturally escaped his

hearer. 'I think, sir,' he resumed after a long pause, 'her ladyship is not—you will not find her upstairs.'

'Where, then—in the drawing-room?'

'No, she has gone out.'

'Out? My mother gone out? Driving? It is rather cold for an invalid; but how comes she to be so much better? You amaze me.'

'The lady is not driving, sir,' answered Yegor; 'about two hours ago she left the house, in company with her maid and the doctor. He—Mr Driscoll—said the day was so fine, his patient could get some exercise in our woods. They are not back yet.'

Here was a piece of news! It sounded heavy and strange. Lady Liscarroll had given a more cheering account of herself lately; but this staggered him. 'Has my mother taken this sort of exercise before? Gone into the woods? I can't credit my ears.'

'Her ladyship used to walk down by the beach when she first came to Silverwood,' thus Yegor answered, but in his accent a sharp ear would have detected some reserve. Philip noticed it.

'Well, I may stroll down that way on the chance of meeting them,' he said, conscious for the hundredth time that this woman never would keep still, but, as soon as his back was turned, gave signs of a life altogether estranged from him. To discuss with servants a matter so intolerable!—he quitted Yegor on the steps, and went along the winding path which

led towards the little inlet, or cove; but arriving, saw no one. The beach was deserted. 'They cannot have gone far,' he reasoned; 'walking, too, and in the last stage of consumption? What does it mean?'

His long sorrow had filled with presentiments a mind originally perhaps superstitious. Every touch on the strings set him quivering. 'She might guess how I feel; but she has never—never cared,' he went on to himself. 'It is like a wild creature in your hands; kindness, severity, nothing will make it understand you.' Miserable, he continued his ramblings along by the beach, but some distance above it, in tracks through the crowded evergreens. But he saw no signs of her. Was it possible she had taken her chance and run?

Anything was to be expected which would bring shame upon them.

While he argued, Philip had reached a hollow in the rocks, from which another turn in the long bay was visible. Just below him rose the walls of St Brandan's Kitchen, but his position did not enable him to see into the thick covert which surrounded it. Nor had he the wish. What his eyes announced was remarkable enough, not to say disquieting. Somewhat west of the chapel a boat was grounding on the dry sand; in it sat Felim O'Riordan; two other men had come down and were just stepping across the gunwale. He did not recognise the first, a cloaked

personage. But the second was Mr Will Hapgood of Derryvore.

No sooner were they on board than Felim and his master plied the oars vigorously, making for the open. It was clear that they would not land at Airgead Ross. Where then? That he could not conjecture; but he stayed watching them from his hollow in the rocks, until they had rounded the point southwards and passed out of his view. Thoughts fearful and obscure besieged Philip. He did not hesitate a moment in connecting this extraordinary apparition of the three men on a desolate coast with his mother's sudden taste for a morning excursion in the woods. To read the whole purport of this writing he must, however, find out a little more.

Fortune threw the trumps into his hands. Not long after the boat dipped under, a sound of low voices and footsteps on the brushwood apprised him that others were in the copse, moving away from his place of concealment. He could not see them, but Driscoll's harsh tones travelled to his ear, and it was perhaps Lady Liscarroll that answered. He let them go on before him. By-and-by, when they could no longer be heard, Philip stood up, sprang from the crag into the covert, and running hastily round through bypaths well known to him, contrived that he should enter the road which led up to the house, just as his mother was resting on the gnarled roots of an enormous oak, the two Driscolls beside her.

She looked pale, and was, or affected to be, tired out. When Philip, flushed and nervous, came up, a smile crinkled her bloodless lips and died off them in the effort. 'Welcome back,' she said, and lifted her forehead, which he touched slightly, but could not bring himself to kiss. 'We hardly expected you so soon. I hope you have brought good news from Cork.'

'We will talk of it,' he replied, the sweat standing on his ruddy skin. 'But you look tired. Isn't it imprudent to be sitting here? What say you, doctor?'

'The morning was delicious, and her ladyship thought a little walk would do her all the good in the world,' answered Driscoll. 'You see, sir, she had her medical adviser. But we overestimated her strength. Now, my lady, will you take Sir Philip's arm?'

He gave it in silence, and they moved on towards the house. 'You found your walk pleasant?' he said after a while, fixing his eyes on her.

'Very,' said she, letting her own rest on the ground.

'How far did you get?' he pursued, still eyeing this strange woman whose blood ran in his veins, while her heart was the most dismal of secrets to him.

'I hardly know,' she said, 'one path is so like another; we went down by the sea.'

'Did you ever hear of St Brandan's Kitchen?'

The arm which was leaning on his fell by the lady's

side. 'Where is it?' she inquired, her face towards the doctor's.

'Oh, it is an old ruin by the seashore,' said Driscoll; 'they give those places quare names entirely. 'Tis not a kitchen it is, but a church with no roof to it.'

'There's a better kitchen in the house yonder,' said Mrs Driscoll, showing her false teeth, 'and Mr Yegor is the finest cook I ever saw out of London.'

Some shadow of a laugh which fell on them had a coldness in it; they said no more while this horrible walk lasted. 'I must lie down till the evening,' remarked Lady Liscarroll, her weakness perceptible in a sudden languor.

'Take your rest at once,' answered Philip, 'you will require it.'

When she was shut into her room with Mrs Driscoll, and the doctor had driven off, the Baronet sent for Yegor, who came unwillingly, to judge by his countenance.

'How often has Lady Liscarroll taken private walks since her illness began?' he asked, and on the servant man's hesitating, he added, 'Nothing but the truth will do; out with it.'

Yegor considered a little. 'Why should I screen her?' he said, with a look in which you might have discerned the pity we give to a wounded animal. 'Sir, you have a bad mother, and they say you will soon be master in this house. Here is my duty, then.

How often has the lady met someone in our woods? I cannot say; it is very often.'

'Good God!' muttered the unhappy man. 'But she has been ill since last summer—in a decline, according to the physician.'

'That, if true, has not kept her in. False I do not say it is altogether. I believe she has put on her maid's dress and slipped out, when we thought her a sick woman on her bed. We stay not up late; the doors are not fast, and they are many.'

'Can you say of your own knowledge that this has happened? Did you ever see her, Yegor?'

'It was perhaps a *roussalka* in the twilight—you call them ghosts—if not, it was Lady Liscarroll. For you to choose, sir.'

'How came you not to let your mistress know?'

'My mistress had her bad dreams, but she disliked them; she wanted to make the other good by trusting her.'

'In which you think she failed?'

'Had you not the name given you by all the world of Lisaveta Carlovna's betrothed, I would never presume to have an opinion, sir, but now—yes, I believe it is no use. What will you do, sir?'

'Can you have a carriage at the door by four o'clock?' said Philip in reply. 'Your best pair of horses; they must go to Renmore Castle and come back this night.'

'Certainly, sir. At four they shall be here. But,

pardon me, sir, you are bleeding; let me call assistance.' Philip's handkerchief was, in fact, suddenly drenched with blood as he put it to his mouth.

'It is nothing,' he said; 'I have broken a small blood-vessel somewhere inside. Don't alarm people. I will go to your room and put it right with cold water.'

The bleeding stopped before many minutes, but Philip's eyes appeared to be suffused with crimson. 'Call me at half-past three,' he said, throwing himself back in an armchair. 'The carriage at four—tell nobody where it is going.'

He fell dead asleep, as under some overpowering weight. Yegor, who spoke and thought in French from long custom, said as he went out of the chamber, *Il dort sur la roue*, like the criminals whom law once tortured before killing them. Philip slumbered while the wheel was under him.

At half-past three he awoke, dipped his head in cold water, and with a shake and a stride mounted to his mother's room. He knocked and went in. She was lying on a couch, the curtains at the windows drawn together. Pulling them aside, the young man let in a brilliant sky upon the lady's face and figure. To his astonishment she wore a dress of floating white, trimmed exquisitely, and set in relief by her yellow hair about a countenance which was certainly almost waxen, but otherwise more youthful than his own.

The abrupt movement startled her. 'I can't bear so much light,' she remonstrated, and was answered with a laugh.

'No doubt, but we must all bear it some time. Are you rested now?'

'Fairly, though I am always weak.'

'You need not tell me that. A little more exercise may strengthen you.'

'How?' she said, springing up in alarm. 'I want my maid,' but before she could touch the bell, he had planted himself in front of it.

'Your maid will come presently. She will put together what things you require; and we shall be leaving at four.'

'But, Philip, you are raving. Where do we go at four?'

'Home,' he cried, in a voice which felled her like a blow. 'Home—to your home and mine—to the place of torment you have made for me. We have done with Airgead Ross.'

'Can't you let me die here in peace?' she entreated.

'You must die at home. Put off that white flummery. It makes you look like a bride—shameful at your age. Tell Sarah North to pack up.'

'Is she coming with us?'

'Let her go to her husband. Married women ought not to be living in strangers' houses. Be ready at four.'

'If I look like a bride, you are the image of your father,' said the lady, giving him scorn for scorn. 'Oh, you will repent it, Philip; you will be sorry yet.'

'At four,' he said, and walked out of the room.

It was done, to the amazement of the household, which, somehow, got wind of the thing, and saw them off in a portentous silence. The long journey was accomplished without a syllable to break its weariness. Philip and his mother now grappled in a speechless conflict—soul to soul; but the man's appeared to prevail. He had wound all his forces up until they were like a spring which, when it uncoils, will strike furiously against whatever opposes it. No talk could make things different. They had passed beyond words; these fleet horses were bearing mother and son to a field of battle.

It was dark when they arrived, and Philip led his mother at once, with grave courtesy, to the room she had last occupied. So completely had the events of the day thrown them off their balance that when Lady Liscarroll walked upstairs without help, treading firmly as though she never felt a moment's illness, he paid no heed to the transformation.

'This is the Marie Antoinette room,' she said, looking round on its choice appointments. Then, not touching him, but erect, 'Philip, do you mean to murder me?'

'I don't know yet,' he answered grimly. 'Yes, I give you the best I have. You understand that when O'Sullivan has brought you dinner, I shall lock you in; and you will do without a maid.'

'I want nothing but my freedom,' she answered disdainfully, flinging her wraps on a chair. She still wore the splendid white lace, over which the lights danced in the wind of the open door. Philip had never seen his mother look so magnificent; even her colour revived, and the sense of danger made her eyes sparkle. He felt madness was in the air.

'I send up O'Sullivan, and afterwards I lock the door,' he repeated, going away.

'Your master is insane,' she said to the steward when he arrived. 'Who is in the Castle besides you and Nora?'

'Her sister's two daughters, my lady,' answered he. 'There is no man at all but myself.'

'Promise me you will not go to bed until after Sir Philip,' she said uneasily. 'He is quite out of his mind. And you will get a note from me in the morning off to—I needn't mention names.'

'I will do the best I can,' he replied. 'But 'tis unlucky to fly back when you left the nest. Why did you not go the night our Grey Tower fell in? 'Twould have been the saving of us all. I wanted you out of this place, for Sir Philip's sake. Now you are here again. What brought you?'

'I had no choice; who has?' she answered.

'Keep a watch on my son; I shall be awake—sleep in this awful room with those things of the murdered Queen about me I never can. Oh, if the night were past!'

It lengthened with the silent hours. Philip came, said good-night as to a stranger, shot the key in the lock, and retreated with heavy footsteps. He had refused to dine, but ordered a great fire in the hall, and sat before it, sunk in wild thoughts. O'Sullivan, alarmed, but no coward, brought rugs which he laid in front of the locked room, and lying there in dog-like fashion, kept vigil. He could hear nothing for several hours but the wood burning downstairs on the hearth, and Philip's occasional stride, falling irregularly, as of an unquiet visitant where men slept.

But, in the dead waste and middle of the night, a curious sound smote on his ears. Creeping to the head of the great staircase, he looked over it and saw his master, with a waxlight in his hand, passing slowly round the hall, from portrait to portrait, examining with close attention, as it seemed, the features of his ancestors, while he talked aloud to some invisible companion, whose steps determined his own. But the phrases were cut and fragmentary, often as replying to another's observations; and who could that other be? O'Sullivan dreaded lest it should break out suddenly upon his sight. The Baronet was approaching, candle in hand; it was time for the steward to draw back, and then a more terrible fear

assailed him. How if this madman should be coming up to his mother's room?

Philip, still talking, ascended half-way, stopped, and covered his eyes, leaning against the balustrade in a profound meditation. 'You see, father, I cannot keep her out,' he said softly; 'she has blood in her veins, you have none, that is why you shrink when she comes. I know I am talking with a shade. But do not put thoughts into me which—I will never—oh, I must not!' He shook himself with a violent effort, such as one makes who is half asleep and feels he should be up and doing against some evil dream. The light dropped from his hand.

'God forgive us,' whispered O'Sullivan, making the sign of the cross, ''tis Sir Walter that is walking the house, showing his son those pictures of men as dead as himself. Is he timpting the poor boy to kill that woman above? I'll go spake to him, at anyrate.'

He moved quietly to Philip, laid a gentle hand upon him, and said, 'Won't you try a little sleep now, sir? Come to your own room, 'tis ready for you and comfortable.'

'Did you see my father?' said Philip. 'He was there—you are standing on the spot. He gave me a command I can't fulfil—you heard him?'

'For God's sake, and his, come to bed!' exclaimed the steward, his blood frozen. 'Come, you have no right to be up alone with yourself at these unholy hours.' He drew the young man on, without re-

sistance; and step by step, as if teaching a child to walk, got him inside his room. Philip tumbled on the bed, dressed as he was, and after some minutes of vague muttering, slept heavily, upon which O'Sullivan, still tremulous, put out the lights, locked the door, and lay down on his rugs again in front of the Marie Antoinette chamber. A voice from within whispered, 'Where is Sir Philip?'

'The house is full of voices to-night,' he said, turning faint, 'but that is my lady's. I have locked him in his room,' he continued aloud. 'You may sleep now; he will not trouble you, with the grace of God.'

CHAPTER XXVI

THE DEVIL'S CRAG

NIGHT with its terrors was past, but the day, how would it wear to an end? Philip had come down, pale as any sheet, his eyes full of the bad dream in which murder stood at his elbow; and he touched no food, nor did he go near his mother's room. Towards eleven he said to the steward, 'Tell that lady I am going out; she is to come with me.'

When she appeared, he passed on through a side door to the open strand, where a boat was lying, helped her into it silently, and took the oars.

'Shall we be alone?' asked his mother, frightened, but trying to show a little courage.

'By ourselves,' was the short answer; and he drove the boat on, making for a reef of rocks which closed in the long Sound of Renmore.

It was tranquil weather, serried lines of cloud barring the sky with bright battalions, under which the water shone. The castle, now to such a lamentable extent in ruins, might have been a Venetian palace by the side of a desolate canal; it looked its age, and the waves lapping on the sands were

monotonously repeating a psalm of death, not unlovely, though formidable. Along the rocks in front cormorants stood ranged, sentinels of solitude; and the crimson growth of some wild vegetation showed distinctly upon them at that distance.

'Why do we come this way?' inquired Lady Liscarroll. 'Have you an appointment at Carraig na Diabhail?' The Devil's Rock was ahead of them.

'You will see,' was all he said.

Nearly an hour's rowing, and they arrived at the reef, where Philip, leaping on the narrow ledge, made his boat fast, motioned that his mother must follow, and led the way up a winding track until they came to the summit, from which an immeasurable grey-green sea stretched out in their sight. A lonelier spot it would be hard to imagine. They rested. Philip's gaze was turned to his Castle, shattered by storms, a wreck on land, with dark woods seeming to grow over it. His mother looked seaward, fear pouring cold into her veins and prophesying evil. 'It is very chill up here,' she said at length.

'Mother,' he began, but stopped; 'mother, we are alone. I have brought you here, where the cliff is steepest—look down, a pebble would drop straight into the water. You know what is to do?'

'I know you are vexed with me,' she said. 'I can't help that.'

'Vexed—I am mad with you,' he cried. 'My brain is on fire. We must come to a clear understanding. Either you will tell me the whole truth —what you are, and what you mean—or—'

'Or you will fling me down the rocks?' she concluded, still between fear and bravado, thinking how she could get back to the boat and escape him.

'It has been the fate of better women,' he said in his low tones, 'but have no dread. One of us must die; surely that was plain when you set foot in the Castle a second time. I cannot kill you. Last night —in a dream—I was near doing it. Not now; but I can kill myself. Unless I hear the truth from your lips, you go back alone.'

She sighed — the sudden deliverance, the new apprehension, were too much. 'What if I make a clean breast of it? Will you forgive me?' she began.

'No conditions,' he said angrily. 'I look in your eyes and I insist on knowing.'

Thereupon she held out her left hand. 'Do you see that, Philip?'

'Your wedding-ring? I never denied you were my father's wife.'

'I am neither his wife nor his widow,' she answered. 'Yesterday you called me a bride. When we met on the way from St Brandan's Kitchen, I had just been married.' The ring shot out a gleam, but she would not hide it.

'I was too late for the wedding,' he answered sarcastically, 'but I caught a glimpse of the bridegroom. Will Hapgood, was it not?'

'Ay, Will Hapgood, the bravest young fellow alive.'

'And you—you love him?'

With a passionate cry she rose to her feet. 'You asked for the truth—you shall have it! I never loved but one man, and his wife I never was nor can be. Henry Lifford is dead. Now you know.'

'He wronged my father; dragged you about the gaming-tables of Europe at his heels; would not share his name with you—that was Henry Lifford.'

'I don't care; go, study a woman's heart, Philip, before you give me lessons. Do you think Joan O'Dwyer—and she but a country girl—would have acted otherwise, had she felt for you as I did for him?'

'Oh, so you have heard about Joan!' he exclaimed, seizing her hands. 'Where is she? Is she dead? How come you to be informed?'

'Where is your cousin Edmund?' she asked sneeringly.

Her cruel joy was monstrous. The heart of the woman lay bare. He could not endure it. A dead woman floating on the waves would have been less horrible. 'Why did you let Hapgood take you for a wife, since you had no liking to him?' he insisted; 'the lad was not your enemy.'

Then she told him all, glorying in it. 'Mind, I could have fled the night your Grey Tower fell. Why did I stay? Because I wanted the match between you and Miss O'Connor to come off. What reason had I to practise these long months of sickness, except that there was no other way to bring you out of your shell? It is as good as done; and you reward me with this! For shame, Philip!'

'The illness you have now quite put off,' he said, not heeding her indignation. 'You are a bride and begin your honeymoon—when?'

'I wrote to Mr Hapgood this morning. He will be at the Castle, I feel sure, before the day is out.'

'Who took your letter?'

'O'Sullivan saw to that. I am perfectly candid with you. Last night I was terrified; but I made a vow that if it passed in safety, I would send for Will and demand my freedom. We are married in the eyes of the law; you have no right to detain me.'

'I shall not do so,' he answered. 'Have you anything more to say?' His tone had quite changed. The lady thought that, after all, he was glad someone should have wrought this deliverance for them, and her spirits danced.

'The cliff has lost its fascination,' she dared to whisper; 'but, Phil, it is all turning out happily. You see I acted for the best.'

His answer was silence. The plashing of oars broke upon it, and induced them to glance up the creek. A small boat was approaching from the Castle, O'Sullivan and another in it. Lady Liscarroll held her breath. 'My God,' she gasped after a moment, 'it is Will himself!'

And Will appeared on the beach, ran swiftly up the rugged path, and in a few minutes was standing beside them. He saluted the lady by taking off his hat; then turned to Philip. 'Has she told you?' were his first words.

The stern dark young man was in a passion of joy and excitement. 'I thought I should be too late,' he muttered. 'You know everything, Sir Philip'—as the Baronet made no answer.

'My mother tells me she is your wife,' he said coldly.

'I regret the circumstances—couldn't be helped—it was Lady Liscarroll herself who stood out so long that I had, in a manner, to compel her.'

Philip interrupted him with a gesture. 'Allow me,' he said, and turning to his mother, 'let me see you into the boat. O'Sullivan shall row you back to Renmore; please wait there till I return. This conversation between your husband and myself can have no charm for you.'

Her expostulations did not avail; Hapgood felt it was impossible for him to second them. 'My son and my husband will be friends,' she said, with

despairing sweetness, as Philip gave her his hand down the rocks. With the steward he was peremptory; and Lady Liscarroll sat, as in Charon's skiff, ferried over the waters of the dead, while the forms of the two young men dwindled to black points on the Devil's Crag.

'I will offer my apologies,' said Hapgood. 'No one else is to blame; although, as I hinted at the outset, you were rather severe on—'

'Sir!' replied Philip. The sentence was left unfinished.

'Anyhow, you accept my apology,' resumed Will, his eyes smarting. This kind of situation was unendurable; he could only hope it would soon be over.

'In saying that I apologise—and really, Phil, I admit you have a right to be offended—I do all that can be expected of a gentleman.'

'Don't talk,' cried the other, hotly. 'Must I throw you headlong over the cliff?'

Hapgood reared like a war-horse. 'You refuse my apology—you insult me!'

The Baronet was musing. 'I haven't a friend in the world,' he said under his breath. 'How is it to be managed?'

'Of course, if you want satisfaction,' said Hapgood, sullenly; 'mind, I don't challenge you—I am in the wrong, I own it—but we cannot fight now.'

Philip replied in a collected manner, as if he saw

his way clear, 'In such a time as this, who would act as our seconds? I can ask no person—yet we must meet.'

'Why must?' remonstrated Will. The other looked out over the wide sea.

'I have the choice,' Philip went on. 'I appoint Rathmorna as the place, the arms, pistols. Bring that lad, Felim O'Riordan; I will bring O'Sullivan. What happens must seem an accident.'

'Since you will have it so,' replied Hapgood, shrugging his shoulders.

'To be sure,' said his antagonist, 'otherwise, you would not leave this but dead.'

'All the same, I call it murder.'

'Call it how you please. To-morrow morning at seven. I put it on your honour to keep these arrangements from Lady Liscarroll. You know how to do it.' He was turning to go, when Hapgood held his arm.

'For the last time, Philip, I offer to take all the blame on myself.'

'Who else? You will scarcely blame me. I have told you what remains.'

Hapgood threw up his arms, swore a silent oath, and followed his challenger down to the boat which Philip turned in the direction of Renmore. The lady was waiting outside the house, shaken to a real sickness, enraged that men should act and decide as if it mattered nothing to women what they did. But she had still

to put on a pleasant face and make trial of her witcheries, 'You are both satisfied at last,' she pleaded, when they came up. 'Philip, will Mr Hapgood not lunch with us, in token of friendship?'

'Another time, my dear Eleanor,' said the new husband, clasping her fingers; 'I mustn't stay.' He bent and kissed her hand, flushed up to the eyes of a sudden, and walked swiftly into the avenue, where a lad was holding his horse.

When he had disappeared, 'You are friends, Philip?' repeated the anxious voice.

'More than friends—relations,' answered her son; 'you have given me a stepfather.'

CHAPTER XXVII

HAND IN HAND

INTO the long, low, wainscotted parlour of Sarsfield House the afternoon sun was darting a furtive ray which lit up Miss O'Connor's face where she rested meditatively, tired of all she had lately gone through. Visitors were announced; she did not catch the names, but on turning to receive them, what was her surprise when Yegor came forward, leading in his wake the shy Felim O'Riordan?

'I wrote for news—you fetch it yourself; is it bad news? Why do you bring this young man?' she said to him in alarm.

She pointed to chairs, but the two heralds of the unknown stood silent, as it uncertain where to begin.

'Is Lady Liscarroll worse?' inquired Miss O'Connor.

'She has left Silverwood,' answered Yegor; 'I cannot say how she is; this youth will tell you, since he saw her last.'

It was now Felim's place to speak. 'Oh, ma'am,' he burst out, 'never mind in what state that wicked creature is; but return home. Sir Philip will not

put the week through, and 'tis I was the cause of it.' He broke down like a child.

'Has Philip met with an accident?' cried Miss O'Connor, a dreadful suspicion breaking into her mind. 'You, Felim?—you were jealous?—you guessed something was wrong and you have—'

''Tis not that way at all,' replied the fisher lad, tremulously. 'Jealous I was, and well I knew where he pitched his love. I must say no more'—his glance lighted on her and then fell—'but if I didn't let out the name of Kilmallock, this day he would be in his full strength as ever. When you came in search of Joan, bad began and worse followed.'

'I am still in the dark. Yegor, I know you got the poor girl's address from this boy,' she said.

'From me, when I was under the influence of the cursed drink—and I broke Father Mathew's pledge. I'm well chastised now.'

'Then Philip quarrelled with you?'

'It is a short story, ma'am. No sooner did I recover from my sinful condition than I was in a fright, dreading you would bring the two of them together—Sir Philip and Joan, I mane, for I don't deny they were sweethearting. So I up and tould Mr Hapgood.'

'But how comes he into it? I am more bewildered than I was.'

Yegor interposed. 'I gave warning to your Excellence months ago that our guest, or her phantom,

was seen in the woods about your mansion talking with a stranger. You did not wish to believe it. The stranger was Mr Hapgood.'

'So, when he knew his time was short, and the tide maybe turning against him,' said O'Riordan, 'he was always mad with love for the witch—I beg your pardon once more—nothing will plaise him but to get a clergyman, and the Driscolls to be witnesses, and he must marry Lady Liscarroll; bad luck to everyone that had a hand in it! I'll never get the taste of St Brandan's leeks out of my mouth.'

'Sir Philip came unexpectedly the same day; saw them returning from the ruined church; took his mother home,' said the Russian.

'And challenged Hapgood,' Felim concluded with a scream. 'They met in the field of Rathmorna, where Sir Philip near broke his neck out hunting. What seconds had they? Faith, 'twas no time to be looking for grand gentlemen, you may take the book on that. But I was attending on Mr Hapgood, and that double-faced O'Sullivan on the master he desaved and chated since her ladyship flew back to the ould Grey Tower. Pistols they had to it, if ye plaise; and they swore us by every book to maintain that whatever should be done was an accident. I'm breaking that oath this minute, but I'll never reckon it a sin.'

'Let me know the end of all this,' she entreated; 'but I can guess—Sir Philip—'

'They tossed a guinea to have first shot, and it fell

to him. I never saw a man stand like Mr Hapgood, his face turned half-way from Sir Philip, but his body stiff as a poker. Flash and whiz! the shot flew by his head, and he never winked. Thin he took his pistol, and with a bow and a smile, he fired into the sky above him. "I apologise, Sir Philip," he cried in a voice you could hear at Bantry; and he was walking off the ground.'

'Good Will Hapgood, brave Will Hapgood!' exclaimed Lisaveta; 'and so the duel ended. But how came Philip by his accident?'

'Wait a while; we thought as you do, O'Sullivan and myself, but there was one thought different. "Hapgood," called the Baronet to him as he was lepping the fince, "you will not lave the field so aisy; you broke the conditions; come back and deliver your fire, or as I am a living man, I will shoot you as I would a hound. To your place, sir!"'

'And he obeyed? He had to commit this murder? What men will do!'

'No less than that. I saw the tears in his eyes—a thing I never saw before. You'd think he was to be hanged and Sir Philip the hangman. The two placed themselves the second time. I couldn't be looking at it; I turned and shut my eyes; but when I opened them, Sir Phil was on the turf and blood spouting from him. Driscoll says 'tis a mortal wound; and he cannot recover. He gave one turn of his hand to Hapgood, but after that no sign of life in him.'

'Still he is not dead—he was not—when you left Renmore Castle,' she said in her agony.

'No, but surely dying; and now he has his sinses—or I don't know if he has them—but night and day he is calling, calling on Joan O'Dwyer. And his mother—I think she will die of his grief—she'd give her new wedding-ring to have Joan back. I could not but travel the world till I found her, and, with Mr Yegor's assistance, here I am for you,' looking on the ground and breathing heavily.

Even in that hour of most painful emotion, Lisaveta marvelled at the lad. 'But you were in love with her, Felim? And do you come?'

'That is the raison I have,' he said, and turned away.

In what words could she praise such a spirit?

But when the great wave was spent which lifted them, she said, 'We were resting to-day after Sheila's funeral. The poor old creature is gone to her long home. Cathal—you know his soft heart—cries after her as if she was the best of wives; and she died with Joan's arms round her neck. But Joan is not strong; give her this night's rest; we will set out early to-morrow.'

But Felim dissented vehemently. 'For the souls of all belonging to you, let us go this day,' he cried. 'How would I face Joan if the master was gone before her? Mr Yegor and myself will take the girl; follow you, ma'am, when you are able.' His hands were out to her.

'No, Felim, I am wrong,' said Lisaveta, wondering at him more and more. 'We will make the most of our time; we will start without delay. But I must break the news to her,' she added, quivering; 'it is the house opposite; we brought them there out of the cabin where I found Sheila.' And with that the girl left them.

Over the next minutes we may fling the white sheet of the dead.

They journeyed as on wings, swiftly, silently. Once Miss O'Connor asked in an aside what had become of Will Hapgood. Felim made a sweeping gesture; he was out in the wide world. The faint, fearful voice of her friend startled Joan, though she caught none of Lisaveta's words. By-and-by she put a question. 'Will his mother live after him?'—she meant Philip, could think of none but Philip.

'The heart is broke in her,' said O'Riordan, gently.

'And in me,' said the girl, with a strange glance at him; 'but you are the best boy that ever walked the ground.'

''Tis enough for me if you see him alive,' was all he could reply.

Lady Liscarroll met them on the threshold, her face astonishingly altered, thin and grey as if the sun had never shone where she came. She kissed Joan and whispered, 'He is living yet,' with a sudden burst of tears; but when she would have done the like

to Lisaveta, the girl drew back, and they exchanged looks in which there was no intelligence. The greatness of her crime smote on the elder woman out of so pure a countenance; but with a slight movement of the lips she passed on and up the marble stairs, followed by her visitors. 'I must prepare him,' she said, speaking to Joan. 'Be ready when I send for you.'

It was perhaps half an hour before they entered the chamber which Joan had first seen on a night never to be forgotten. She might, indeed, never have quitted it, for the hangings and ornaments were the same; a spectral silence reigned; the light was subdued; and on the pillow she saw the face which had haunted her with its melancholy and its passionate fire.

Their eyes were meeting now, and time had ceased or them. 'You will understand, Philip,' said his mother, bending low to his ear, 'that I sent and brought her. It was my doing.' His great eyes stared upon the lady.

'Do the rest,' he answered, and put forth a wasted hand to show what it contained. 'Your promise, Joan,' he breathed; a smile changed all his features to one radiance. 'I kept yours—where is mine?' It was the token. 'But there is some of my blood on it now,' he continued after a little; 'the shot took me on that side where I kept it always.'

She sat down by him and clasped the hand. 'What will I do for you?' said Joan; 'you are sore hurt, my

dear. And aren't you sorry for all the sin that was committed?' He made a gesture of assent. 'If it was the red wound of death—and God forbid!—whatever you ask of me is done already.'

'How should I ask any one thing but your promise?' he answered, as the sound of feet was heard outside, and the door opened.

''Tis Father Falvey,' said her lover, his eyes lighting up again. 'Now you will do as you are told. You never would before—but that is all over.'

The clergyman came in, vested, and behind him Lady Liscarroll, Miss O'Connor and old Cathal, who fell on his knees in a corner, sobbing. While the others ranged themselves about the bed, Father Falvey spoke. 'I call you here present to witness the marriage of Sir Philip Liscarroll and Joanna O'Dwyer. Cathal, will you give away your daughter?'

'If I had twinty I'd give them to Sir Philip,' he exclaimed, rising from his knees. 'Joan, dear, take that hand in your own, and never let it go from you.'

Lady Liscarroll made a sign to the priest. 'Be quick,' her lips motioned: the bridegroom had not many minutes to live.

They hastened through the marriage service, Philip whispering his answers and Joan giving hers in tones of clear low music. 'Till death do us part,' said each of them, casting an instantaneous gloom upon the air. His mother thought, 'We should have waited; the joy will be too much for him.' Since his

bride's arrival, the last remnant of life had been spent prodigally. But the priest was giving them his benediction, full of good wishes and bright hopes not in their case to be fulfilled. 'Ye are man and wife now,' he said. 'May this be the first day of a better life! In God's hand I leave ye.'

'If I could hold on till Edmund gets here,' said Philip, sinking back, 'I would go then, since go I must, Joan; don't cry like that, my dear wife; perhaps I have been a son of bad luck, but I am a happy husband.'

'Edmund will be here to-night,' said his mother. 'I have a letter from him. He read in the *Times* an account of your—your accident—that you were ill; and he follows his letter. Can you rest till he comes?'

'I want Joan to sing to me one of those old songs,' he replied, whether awake or dreaming it was difficult to be sure; then he rallied. 'If you would sing "The Brow of Nefin," dear. I used to like it more than all, and your father gave me the meaning of the Irish. Often I thought of it after you went away, and "the blossoms fell from the branches." They did, Joan, for me; will you sing it? I would go to sleep then.'

She looked at her dying husband—at those in the room—and with a heaving bosom tried to take up the ballad. Her voice broke, recovered, grew sweet and tender as a cradle-song or a light breeze among the rushes. A music that had in it all their life—

delight and sorrow and separation and longing—blossoms cut by the winds of March falling on the bridal-bed—the bed of death. She sang like a stream that slips with murmuring and a wreath of foam into the great sea, into the unfathomable deep. His dream was on Philip, and he saw no more of this world; but perhaps the beloved voice sang in his ears still as he went down.

The girl paused suddenly, and watched his lips; then she arose, put his arms about him, and laid her face on his face. The women came to take her away.

'I had him to myself this one minute; now I give him back to you,' she said, rising erect. 'Let me go home out of this. But I have no home.' She paused and looked up. 'Well, God's will be done. Come, father.' Cathal yielded his hand meekly, and they were at the door.

There was no entreating her, it seemed, until Lisaveta said, 'But you are his widow, Joan; at least wait until the last rites are over.'

'Wait this one day,' said Lady Liscarroll, 'for his sake, not for mine—oh, not for mine. I know even you could not. Till to-morrow,—he would surely wish that.'

'I will stay till he is out there with his father,' said Joan at last, pointing in the direction of the cemetery. 'Then I lave this place to you, Lady Liscarroll.'

With that they were obliged to be content.

CHAPTER XXVIII

CEANGAIL—THE BINDING

EDMUND reached the Castle at nightfall, and Renmore gave a sad welcome to its new master. From Lisaveta he learned the tidings of death and marriage, even in that strange order, which seemed natural where all things had been rapt to a sphere so real as to make the common day imaginary.

'I have had a severe struggle in London—no more of that,' he said when the story was at an end. 'As usual I come too late. Here is the volume of Sir Walter's poems which, after years of neglect, a great publisher is bringing out with every hope that they will be celebrated. If my cousin could have known? Where is his mother?'

'She retired early. In the room which you call, I believe, Marie Antoinette's. You will not show her the poems? I would not, were I you.'

'Certainly; I agree; no use in ripping up old wounds. And Joan—the new Lady Liscarroll—where is she?'

'Praying by her husband's bedside. We go in and

out quietly; she will not die of it; her troubles have given her strength.'

'It is the best they can do for any of us,' he said, and in a moment they were the friends of last year, their thoughts in perfect unison.

It was well the young man came on the heels of his letter. A shock awaited them all next morning. When Nora O'Sullivan went to call her mistress in the Queen's chamber, she found Lady Liscarroll apparently sleeping; but it was something else. On the floor lay a broken phial, and the pillows were stained with brown spots, as if some liquid had spurted over them. Dr Driscoll, sent for in haste, declared that the lady must have expired many hours previously.

'It is a sad misadventure,' he observed to Edmund, who had gone with him into the room. 'But I can vouch it to be no more. Your aunt was under my charge, in extremely critical health, and I prescribed opium for her several times, though always to be administered by myself. No doubt she felt the need of it last night and took an overdose. I am ready to certify the case under my hand.'

'But where did she get that quantity?' insisted his hearer.

The doctor almost smiled. 'Some women always carry laudanum with them,' he said. 'I can give you no information on the subject.'

There was a formal inquest; but the dead lips kept their secret, in which none had shared, or else the

doctor's wife had confidences even from Driscoll. Mother and son were buried in one grave next to Sir Walter's; and Cathal, who saw it filled in, spoke the lady's epitaph. 'He has her now, at long last, after all her wanderings—as I saw in my drame. Kindness would not cure her, and the living had no hould upon her; but the hand of a corpse could bring her down. God rest them and ourselves!'

Of Will Hapgood for many months nothing was ascertained. He had left the country—in what direction who could say? But his mother knew that he had been given a commission in the Austrian service; and during the furious insurrection which stained with blood the streets of Vienna, in March 1848, he was struck down fighting in defence of his new flag.

Events had now shaped themselves to foreseen issues. It was inevitable that the heir of Renmore should offer himself to Lisaveta, and how could she refuse what her heart and her judgment approved? But they would not stay in the terrible old house, nor even keep it up; and its ruins are less forbidding than were those haunted chambers and staircases which saw this drama played to the end. Airgead Ross belongs to a more lightsome world, yet the villages far and wide have disappeared, or long lines of mouldering cabins lead up to what is left of them; the populous country has grown a wilderness, beautiful and sad, under the silence that followed the Famine and that still broods over Glenmasson and Renmore. The past, with its

dim associations, had no future. It is hardly now remembered.

On a rich warm evening, flushed with sun and cloud, the sea a yellow mist, dreamy as fairyland, you might have watched Edmund and his wife where they stood on the terrace, waiting until a white-headed, ancient man came slowly up the steps, leaning on the arm of a dark beauty, who was very tender to him. 'I am not long for this world,' said Cathal, when he had reached his friends; 'and if this was the Wizard's Knot I made between ye, I am satisfied; but I'd like to see another twist of it.'

Lisaveta shook her head. 'So would I, perhaps. Felim is a fine brave lad; but Joan—our Joan, as the people call her—has other thoughts. Will it never come to pass, my dear?'

The dark beauty touched a locket on her breast which she always wore. It held a tress of hair, steeped in crimson. 'Those are my marriage-lines,' she said, with her strange smile, not altogether of our world. 'And, father—this is my share in the WIZARD'S KNOT.'

THE END

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